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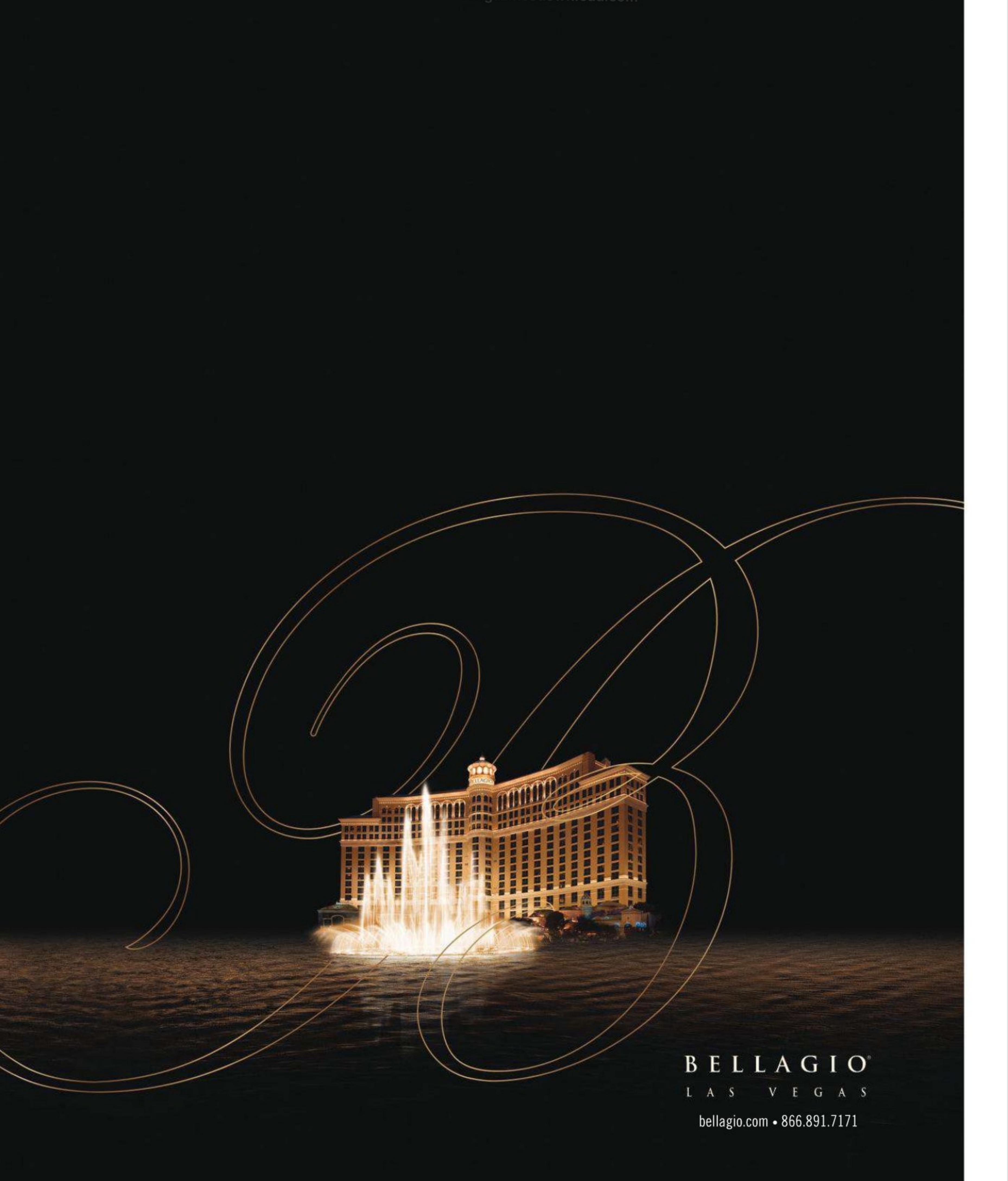
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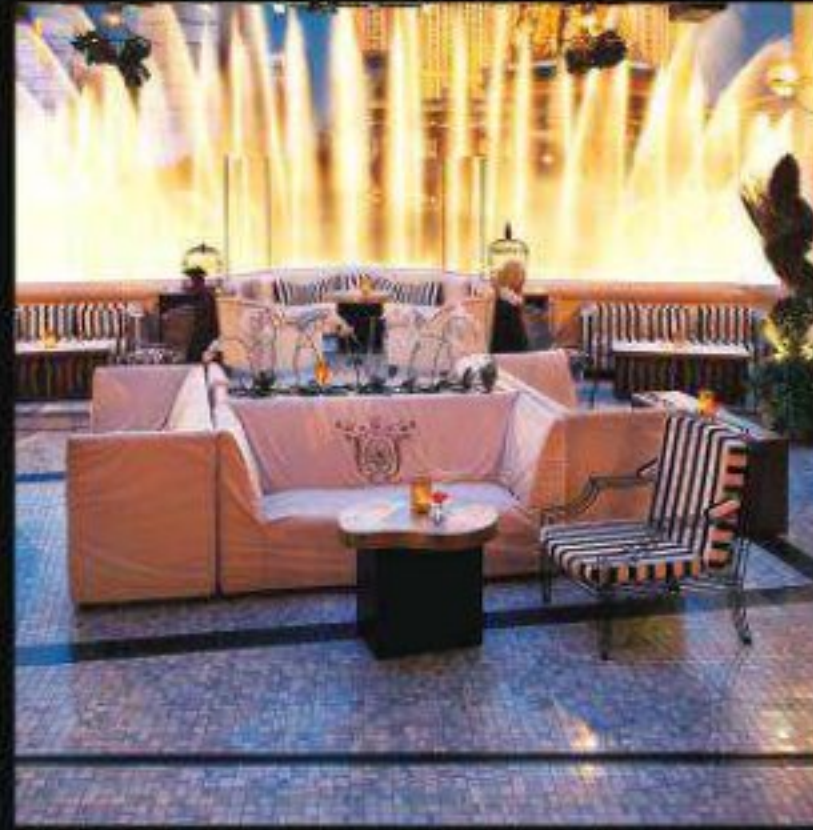
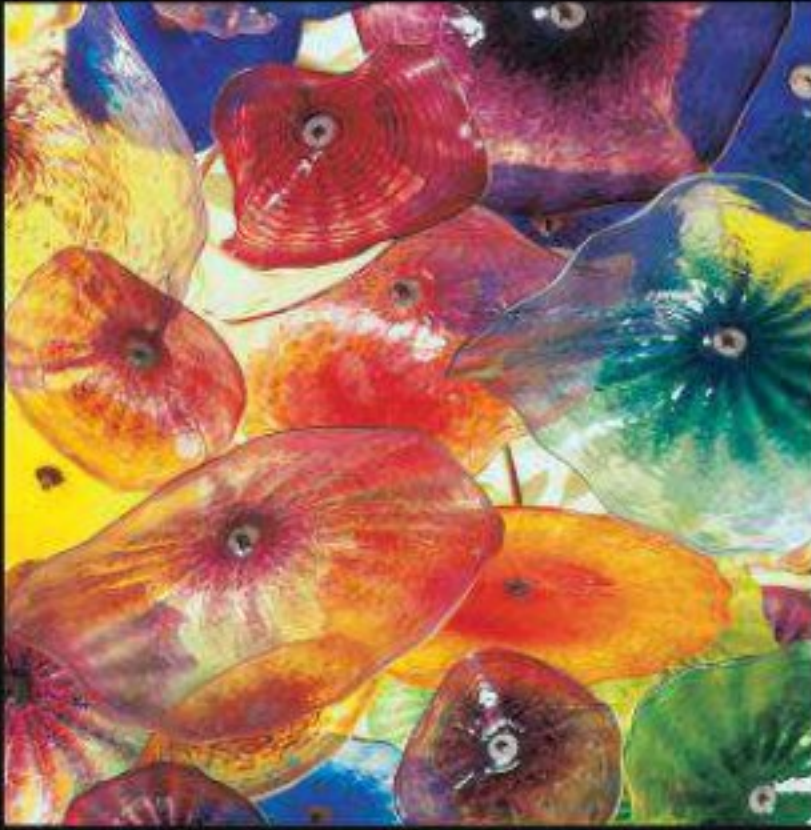
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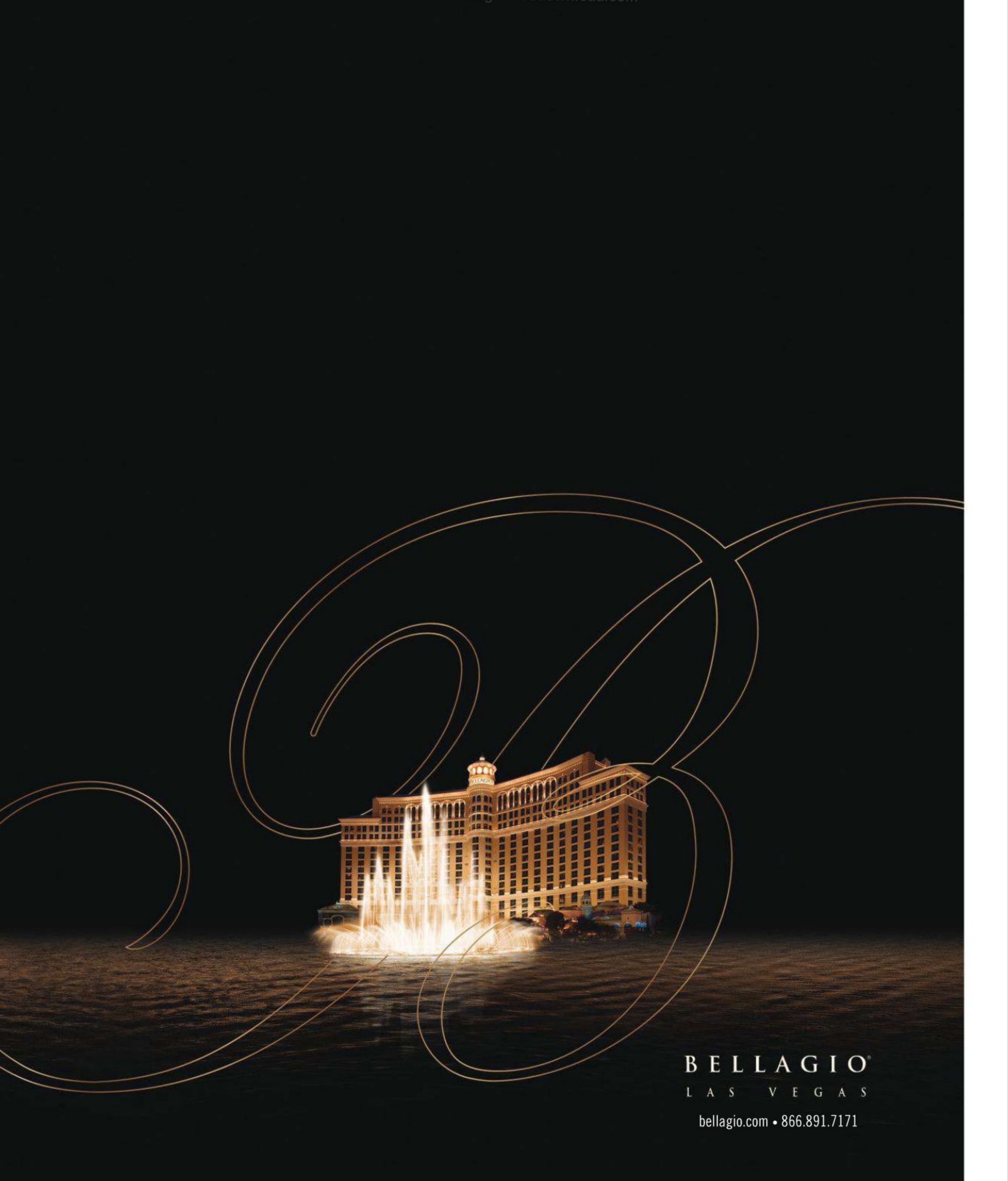
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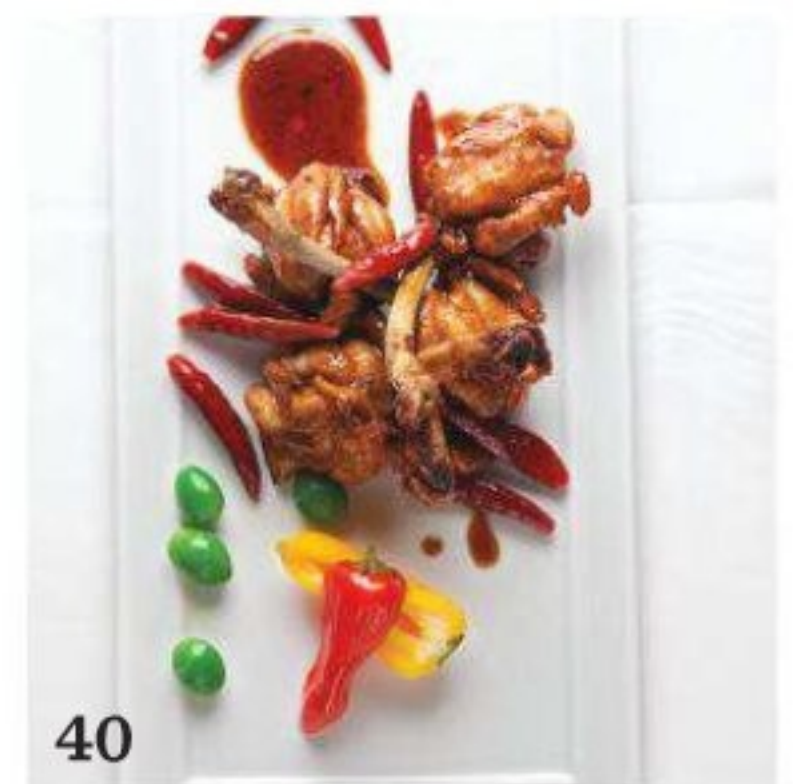
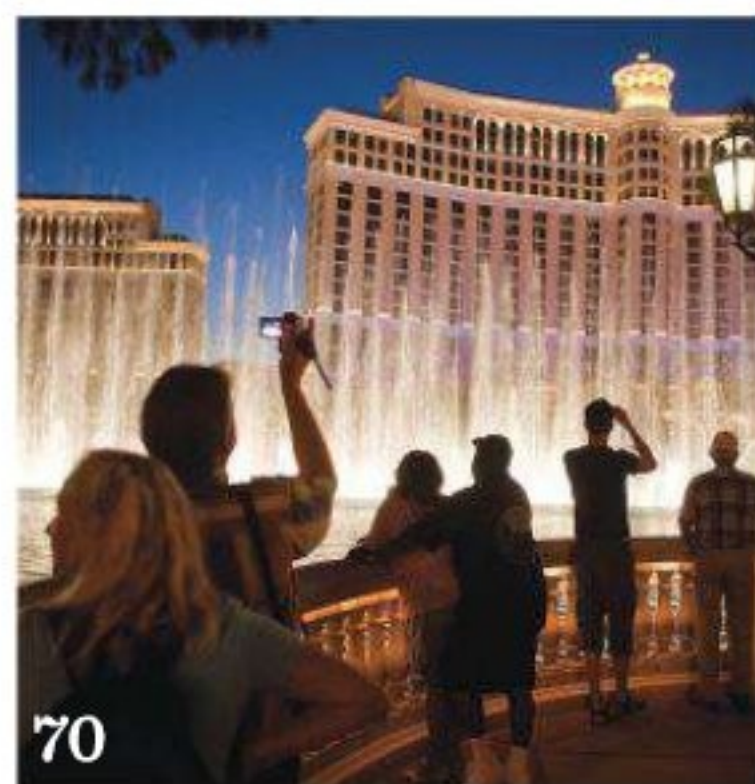
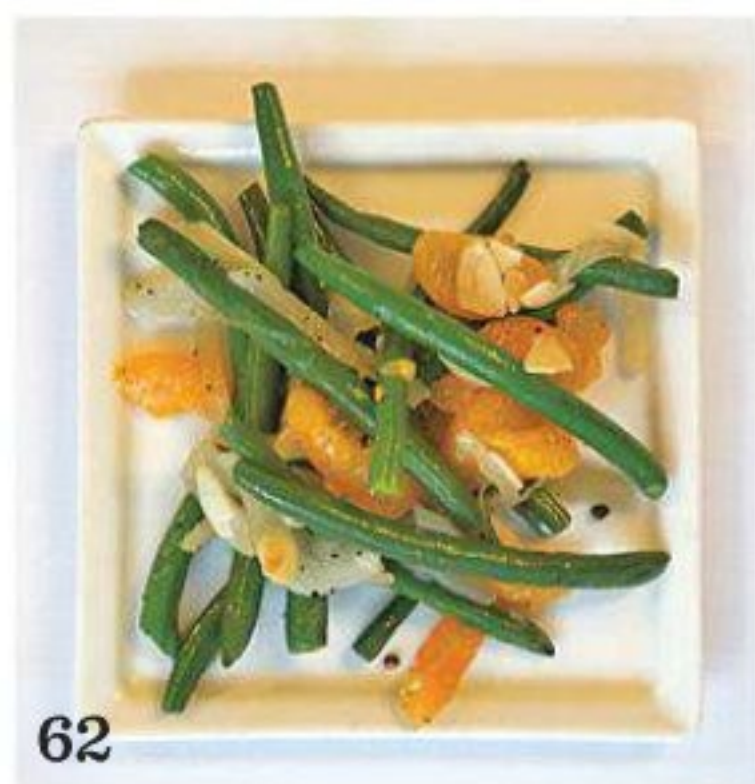
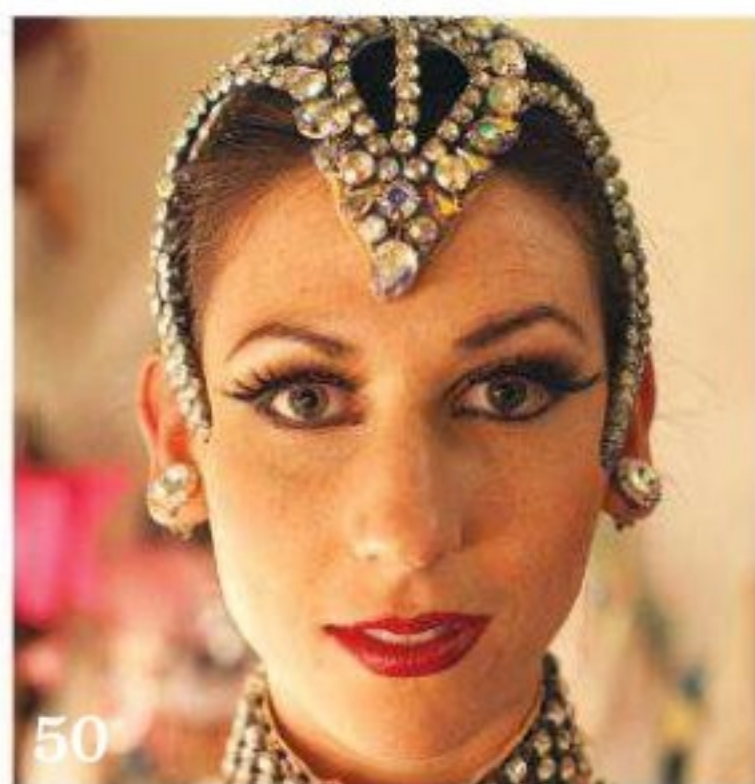
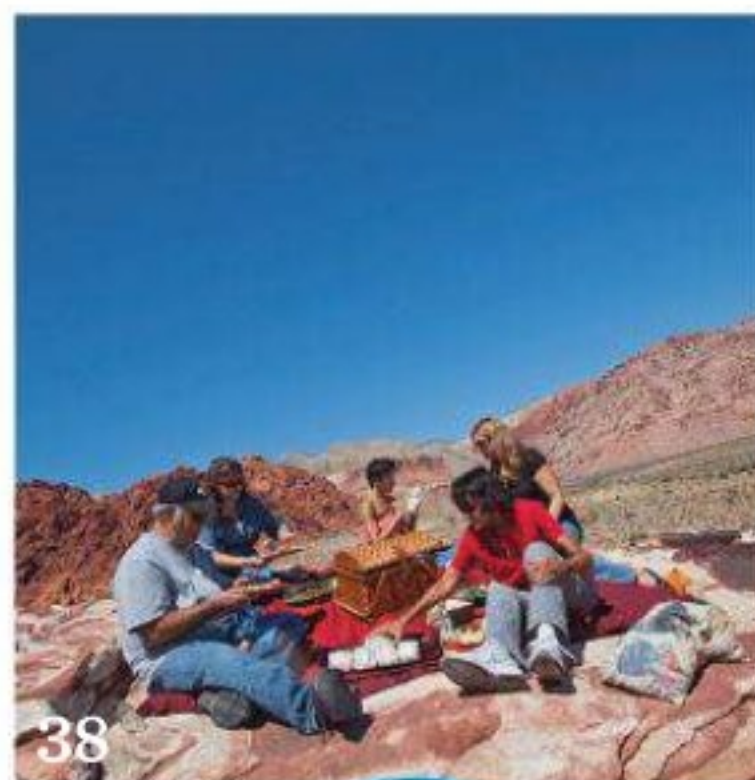
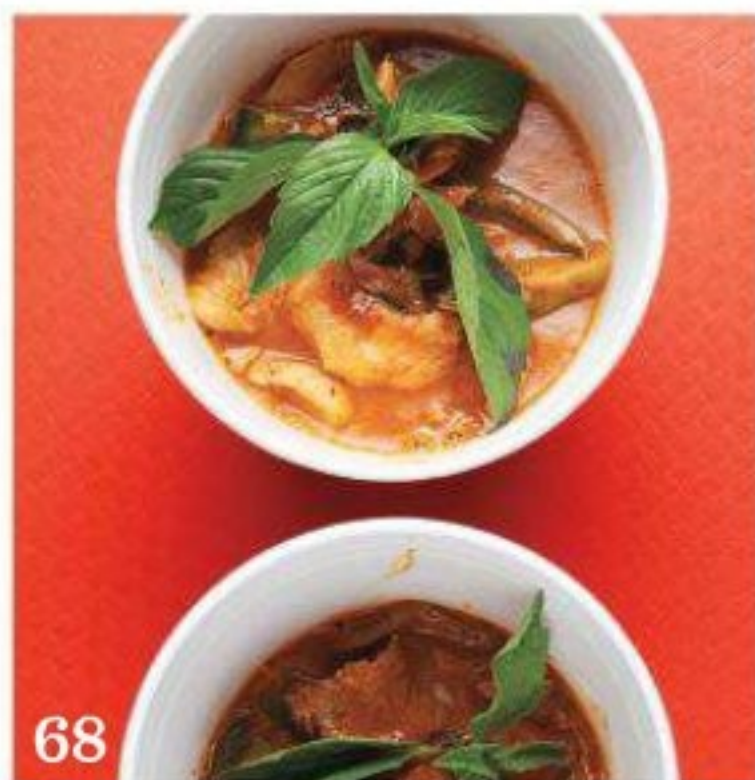

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The Las Vegas Issue

Las Vegas has always been a city of the senses, but in recent years, its pleasures have pointed more toward the belly than ever before. What other city in the world features the best French chefs alongside short-order cooks slinging superb hash browns? Pristine Mediterranean seafood and top-notch cocktails? Superlative steaks and authentic Thai, Chinese, Mexican, and other immigrant cuisines? Some of this country's finest meals can be had on the Strip and off. It's a wonderland for food lovers: spectacular and over-the-top, but also very real and incredibly delicious. —*The Editors*



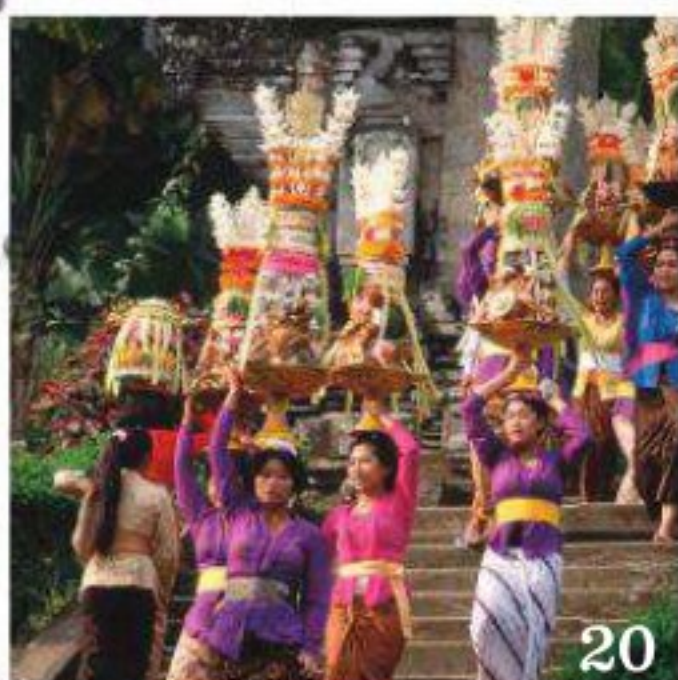
Cover Porterhouse with Lemon-Thyme Butter PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COLEMAN

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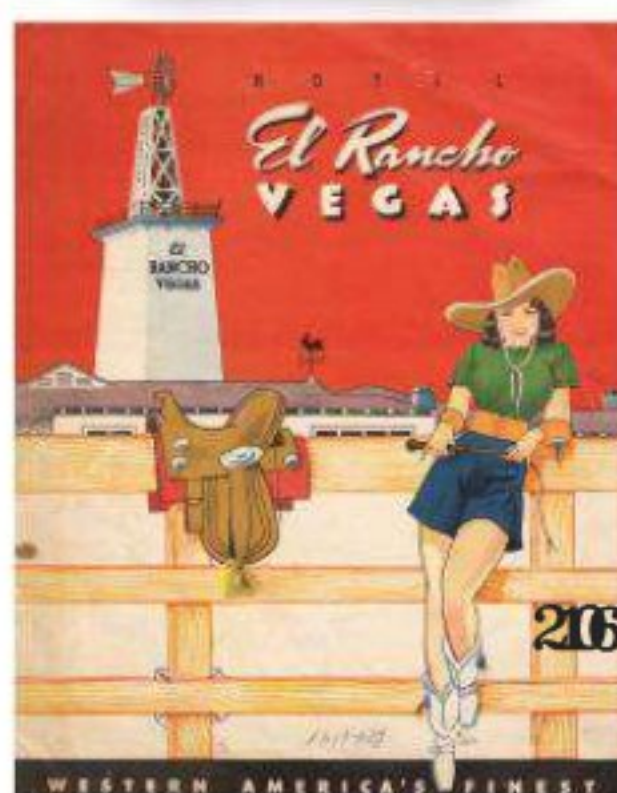
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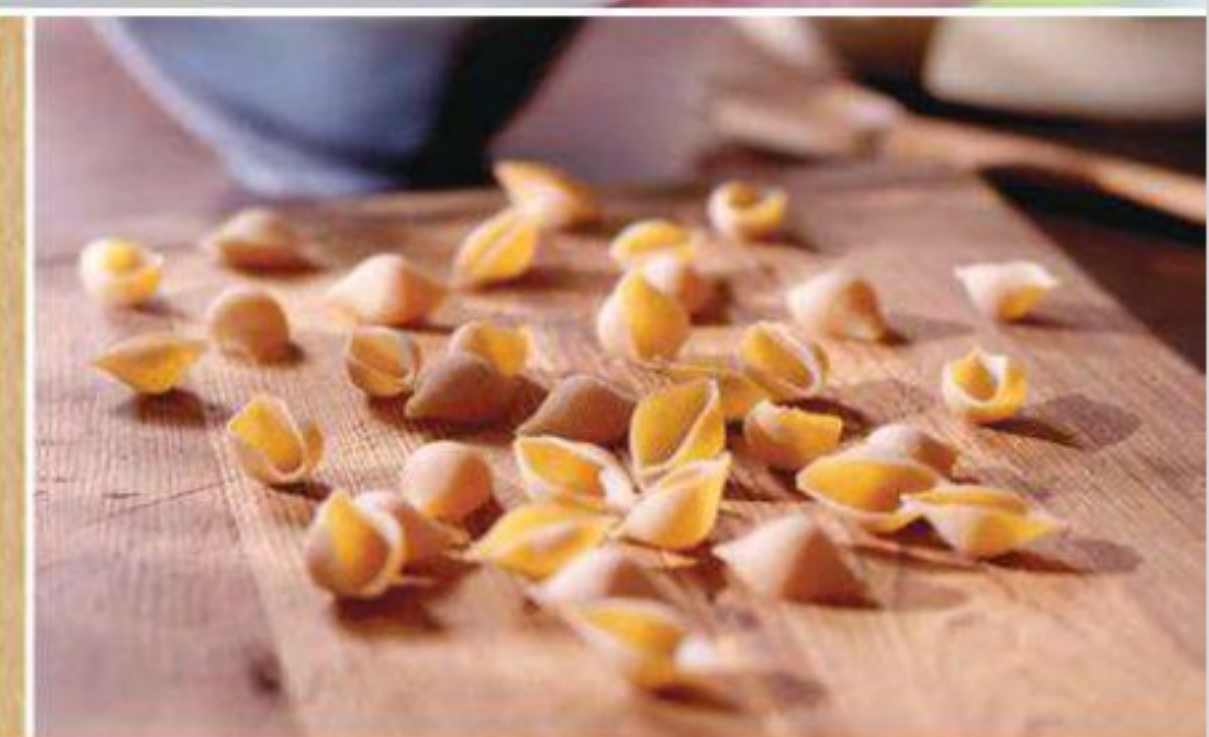
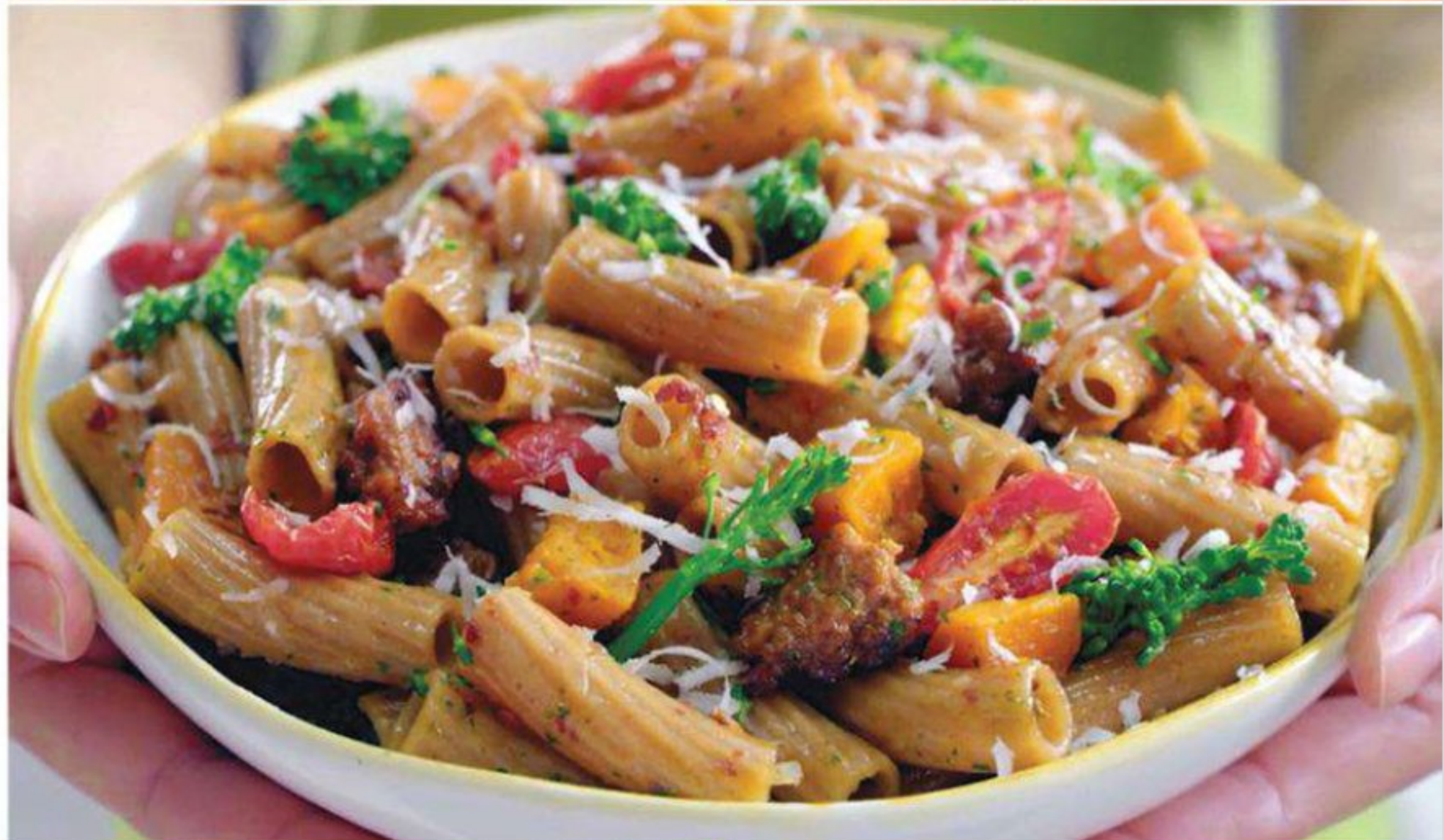
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FIRST



City of Dreams

Why we love Las Vegas

THE STARDUST HOTEL, Las Vegas, 1973. The group you see in the photo above is dining in the casino's showroom, watching the showgirl spectacular Lido de Paris and enjoying dinner and cocktails. They're in town to attend an office-products convention. I know, because one of the people in the picture is my dad—Larry Oseland, the bearded guy toward the back on the left; my mom, Bernice, is sitting across from him in the floral-print dress with the plunging neckline. They're doing what people usually do in Las Vegas: having the time of their lives, an aspiration shared by the 40 million people who will visit the city in 2012. That's a lot of shrimp cocktails. The Grand Buffet at the MGM Grand alone serves 19 people per minute, 410 pounds of crab legs per day, 120,000 meals per month, and 16 tons of macaroni and cheese per year. It's staggering.

And it's moving, when you stop to think about it. It's so essentially American, this dream that Vegas embodies: A place where not a single person goes away unsatisfied—whether that means doing a controlled free fall from a 1,149-foot tower overlooking the

Strip or sitting down to 11 courses prepared by a Michelin-starred chef. People come from all over the world to experience it, and to provide it. Since my parents visited the city in the early '70s, the population of the metropolitan area has exploded from 250,000 to 2 million people.

Last fall I spent nearly a month in Vegas, shooting season four of the Bravo TV series *Top Chef Masters*, which will air this summer. A number of *SAVEUR* editors joined me there, and we let our senses be our guide as we began producing this issue. The city we discovered was cosmopolitan in a way we couldn't have anticipated. We felt it on the Strip, in the exciting modernist dishes at Twist, French chef Pierre Gagnaire's first and only restaurant in the U.S. We felt it out on Spring Mountain Road, in the Asian markets where we were able to lay our hands on ingredients I'd defy you to find most anywhere else this side of the Pacific. Vegas holds out the same promise to everyone: sheer joy. It's about so much more than excess and hedonism. But it's about those things too. And we love it. The fun starts on page 34. —*JAMES OSELAND, Editor-in-Chief*



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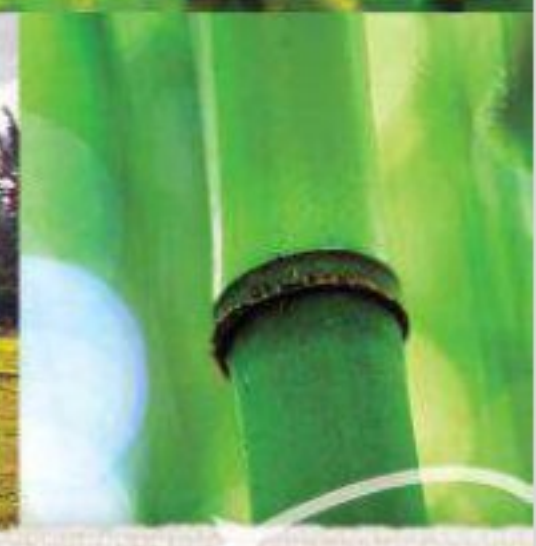
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FARE

Riches and Rituals From the World of Food, Plus Agenda and More

Easter Comfort

A traditional Polish soup makes the holiday in one small Vermont town



I WAS HUNTING DOWN fresh horseradish for the Passover seder plate when a grower near my home in Vermont mentioned that some customers use his crop for *biały barszcz*, a Polish soup eaten at Easter that's often spiked with the pungent root. As I found out, *biały barszcz* (pronounced be-AH-lee BARsht) means "white borscht" in Polish, but the ivory-colored soup rich with sour cream, kielbasa, and eggs (see page 14 for

a recipe) shared little with the beet borscht I knew. My Jewish great-grandparents, along with many Catholic Poles, came to this country from Eastern Europe in the late 19th century. Our ancestors likely made *barszcz* with the European cow parsnip plant, also named *barszcz*, according to Maria Dembińska's *Food and Drink in Medieval Poland* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). The beet version came later.

In Vermont, many Polish Catholics settled in the quarry town of West Rutland. Ninety-year-old Emily Pokrywka grew up there and has never lived far from Saint Stanislaus Kostka Church. "My mother spent days preparing for Easter," she recalled. "We raised a pig out back. We smoked the kielbasa over an apple wood fire."

The kielbasa, along with horseradish and eggs, symbolizing Jesus's sacrifice and rebirth, were

set out with other foods on the Saturday before Easter, when the priest visited. "He would bless the food and hand us each a hard-boiled egg," Pokrywka recalled. "That was exciting; Friday was a fasting day, so we were hungry." *Biały barszcz* was the first meal eaten on Sunday. The priest stopped making house calls long

Vermont resident Emily Pokrywka preparing Polish white borscht.

© MELISSA PASANEN



ago, but “it isn’t Easter if babci doesn’t make barszcz,” said Pokrywka’s daughter, Carolyn Wos, using the Polish-American word for grandmother.

Recipes vary, but all contain kielbasa and hard-boiled eggs. Older versions begin with *zur*, fermented rye flour, though modern cooks give their soup its tart edge with lemon juice, vinegar, or sour cream. “Everyone does it different depending on where their family came from,” Pokrywka said, as she simmered kielbasa for the broth. When the soup was done, she seasoned her bowl with horseradish and reminisced about “cousins by the dozens” enjoying *biały barszcz* after Easter Mass. “Those were the good old days,” Pokrywka said, “when we were all together.” —Melissa Pasanen

Biały Barszcz

(Polish White Borscht)

SERVES 4–6

The recipe for this Polish Easter soup (pictured, above) works just as well with prepared horseradish.

- 2 lb. smoked kielbasa
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 leeks, trimmed, sliced
- 1 small yellow onion, sliced

- 2 medium russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1” cubes
- 2 sprigs marjoram
- 1 bay leaf
- 1½ cups sour cream
- ¼ cup flour
- ¼ cup freshly grated horseradish
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup roughly chopped dill
- 2 tbsp. chopped parsley
- 4 boiled eggs, cut into wedges

Boil kielbasa and 8 cups water in a 6-qt. saucepan. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook to flavor broth, about 25 minutes. Pour liquid and kielbasa into a bowl; reserve. Return saucepan to medium heat. Add butter, garlic, leeks, and onion; cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Add reserved liquid, potatoes, marjoram, and bay leaf; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook until potatoes are tender, about 30 minutes. Discard marjoram and bay leaf; purée soup in a blender. Return soup to pot; bring to a simmer. Meanwhile, whisk sour cream and flour in a bowl, add ½ cup soup, and whisk until smooth. Pour mixture into soup; cook, stirring, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Cut kielbasa into ½”-thick slices; add to soup along with horseradish, salt, and pepper. Garnish with dill, parsley, and eggs.



QUEEN OF SNACKS It looks like a block of peanut butter, but gjetost is cheese, even if it is brown and sweet. Meaning “goat cheese” in Norwegian, gjetost (pronounced YAY-toast) is made by caramelizing whey left over after removing the curds from goat’s milk. Whey, which has been a part of the Norwegian diet since the Viking Age, is boiled until thickened, and then placed into molds to harden. Pure goat’s whey cheese has a salty, burnt sugar taste. The most popular whey cheese in Norway, however, named *Gudbrandsdalsost* for the Gudbrands Valley, where it originated, has only 10 percent goat’s whey; the rest is cow’s whey, milk, and cream. The brand available in the U.S., called Ski Queen Gjetost, has a mild caramel flavor. In Scandinavia, it’s added to sauces for reindeer and other game, and it’s great, too, for fondue. Like Norwegians, though, I enjoy it best sliced and simply served on crispbread. —Nachammai Raman

One Good Bottle

Spud Spirit

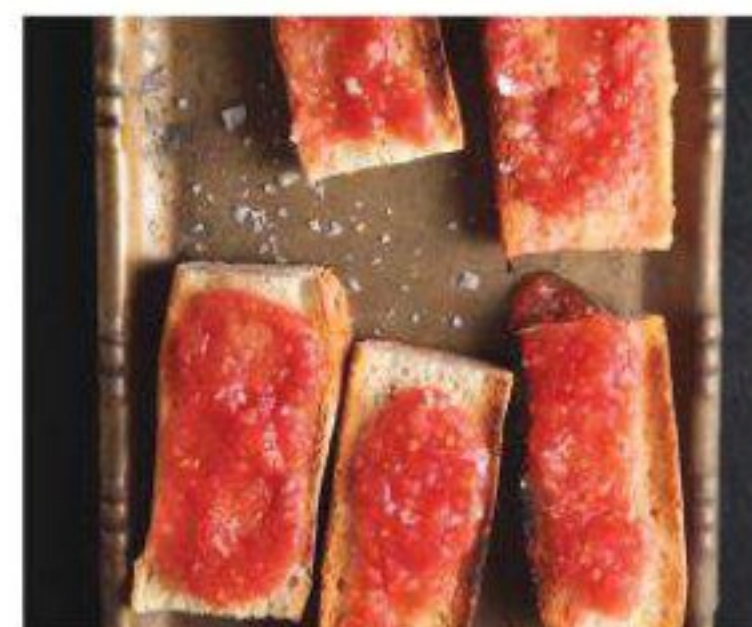
Farmers in central Pennsylvania dig up nearly 300 million pounds of potatoes per year. Most of them are supplied to snack companies to be sliced and fried for chips. Lately, though, there’s another buyer for the crop. Boyd & Blair Potato Vodka (\$33) was created in 2008 by two friends from Pittsburgh, Barry Young and C. Prentiss Orr, who won an agricultural grant aimed at helping potato farmers develop new markets for their spuds. They opened a distillery in a glass factory where their bottles are manufactured on the premises. Pot-distilled using the high-starch Katahdin variety and other potatoes grown in Pennsylvania, Boyd & Blair—named in tribute to relatives of the partners—is, like its Eastern European counterparts, sweeter than grain-based vodkas, with surprising notes of vanilla and coffee. All that potato starch gives it an exceptionally creamy mouth feel, but it’s also bright and luscious on the back end. Though it’s wonderful in fruit-based cocktails, this vodka is smooth and sweet enough to sip neat. —Joe Dolce



On the Web

Map Quest

Since *SAVEUR*’s first issue in 1994, we’ve traveled to nearly every corner of the world, exploring markets, restaurants, taverns, food carts, and home kitchens everywhere, from the highlands of Scotland and the coast of Kenya to just a few blocks from our office in New York City’s Koreatown. Now, on *SAVEUR*.COM, we’re bringing that wealth of global culinary knowledge together in a tool designed for the convenience of the hungry traveler: The Saver Essentials. Each month, we reach into our archives to collect stories, recipes, maps, itineraries, and photographs from a particular culinary destination. January kicked off with the Essential Spain; February brought the Caribbean; March was Mexico; this month, it’s the Middle East—its history, its cultures, and most of all, its many vibrant foodways. Whether you’ve already bought your plane ticket or you’re just looking for a good story for when you serve that Lebanese beef *kafta* to friends, you’ll find everything you need at *SAVEUR*.COM/ESSENTIALS.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TODD COLEMAN (5); ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI



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Brendan McHale is the executive chef of the Tasting Table Test Kitchen & Dining Room in New York.



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AGENDA

April 2012

April

2

Birthday

MARJORIE CHILD HUSTED

1892, Minneapolis, Minnesota

In 1926, Minneapolis native Marjorie Husted landed a job at the local Washburn-Crosby Company, one of several flour mills that eventually



became General Mills. There, she dreamed up the fictional culinary guru Betty Crocker. For more than two decades, Husted

wrote the scripts and, at times, provided the voice for the kitchen maven on the popular syndicated radio show *The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air*, disseminating cooking advice to 1 million listeners.

April

7-9

OISTINS FISH FESTIVAL

Oistins, Barbados

Each Easter weekend the coastal town of Oistins mounts a festival to showcase the talents of its fisherfolk. Thousands come to feast upon grilled, fried, and barbecued mahimahi, kingfish, and flying fish. Quick-handed fishmongers vie for thousands of dollars in prize money in piscatorial boning and skinning competitions, while craftspeople display their handiwork and bands play calypso and reggae tunes. Info: barbados.org

April

8

DRAGON WELL TEA FESTIVAL

Longjing Village, Hangzhou, China

In Hangzhou, in southeast China, copious rainfall and moderate temperatures create ideal growing conditions for Longjing, a green tea so sought



after for its flowery flavor that it was once reserved for the imperial household. Every spring, when the local crop is harvested,

celebrants at this monthlong festival enjoy tea ceremonies, watch tea being wok-roasted, and drink their fill of the famous steeped beverage, whose taste locals liken to the morning dew. Info: 86/571/8796-1908

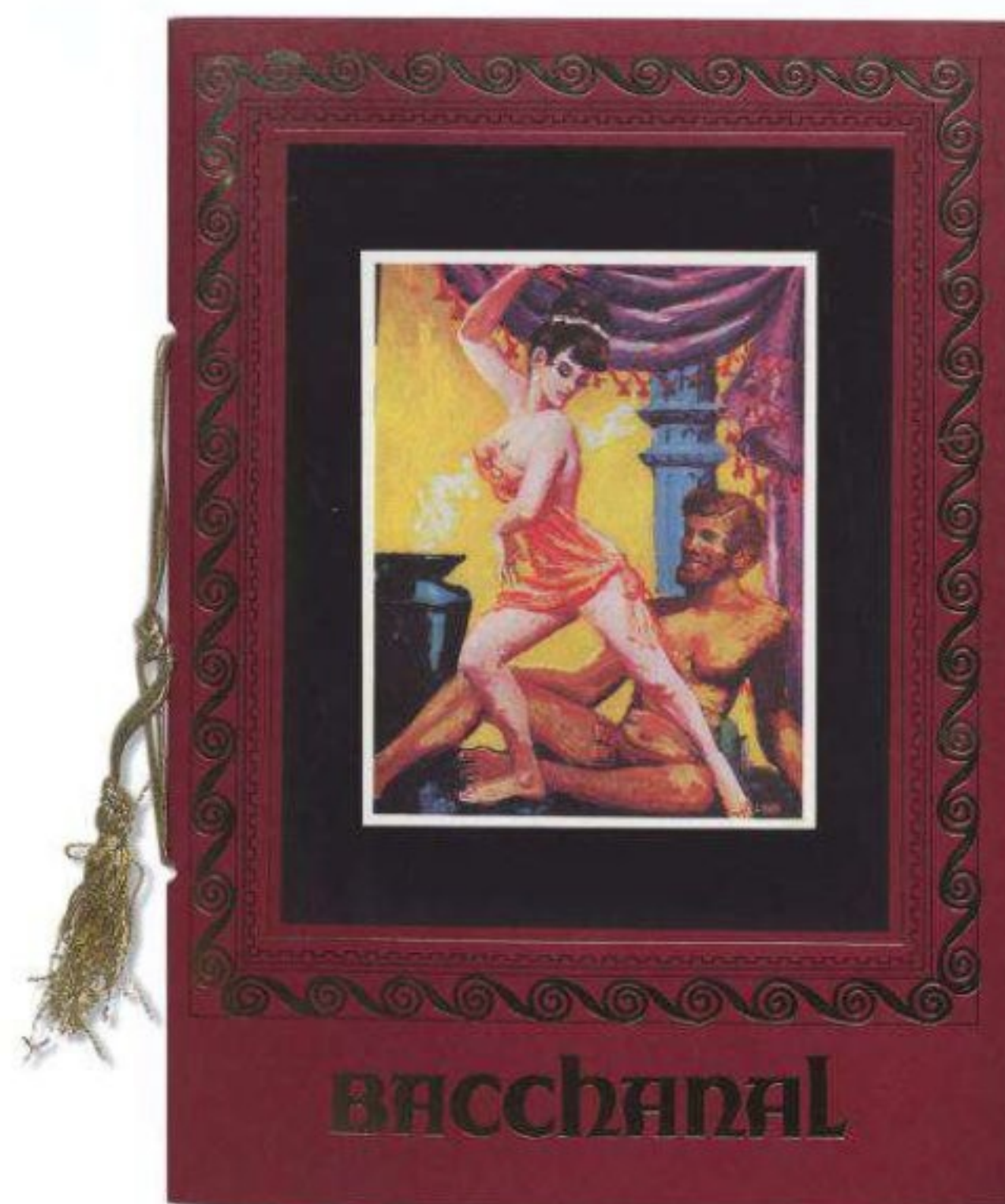
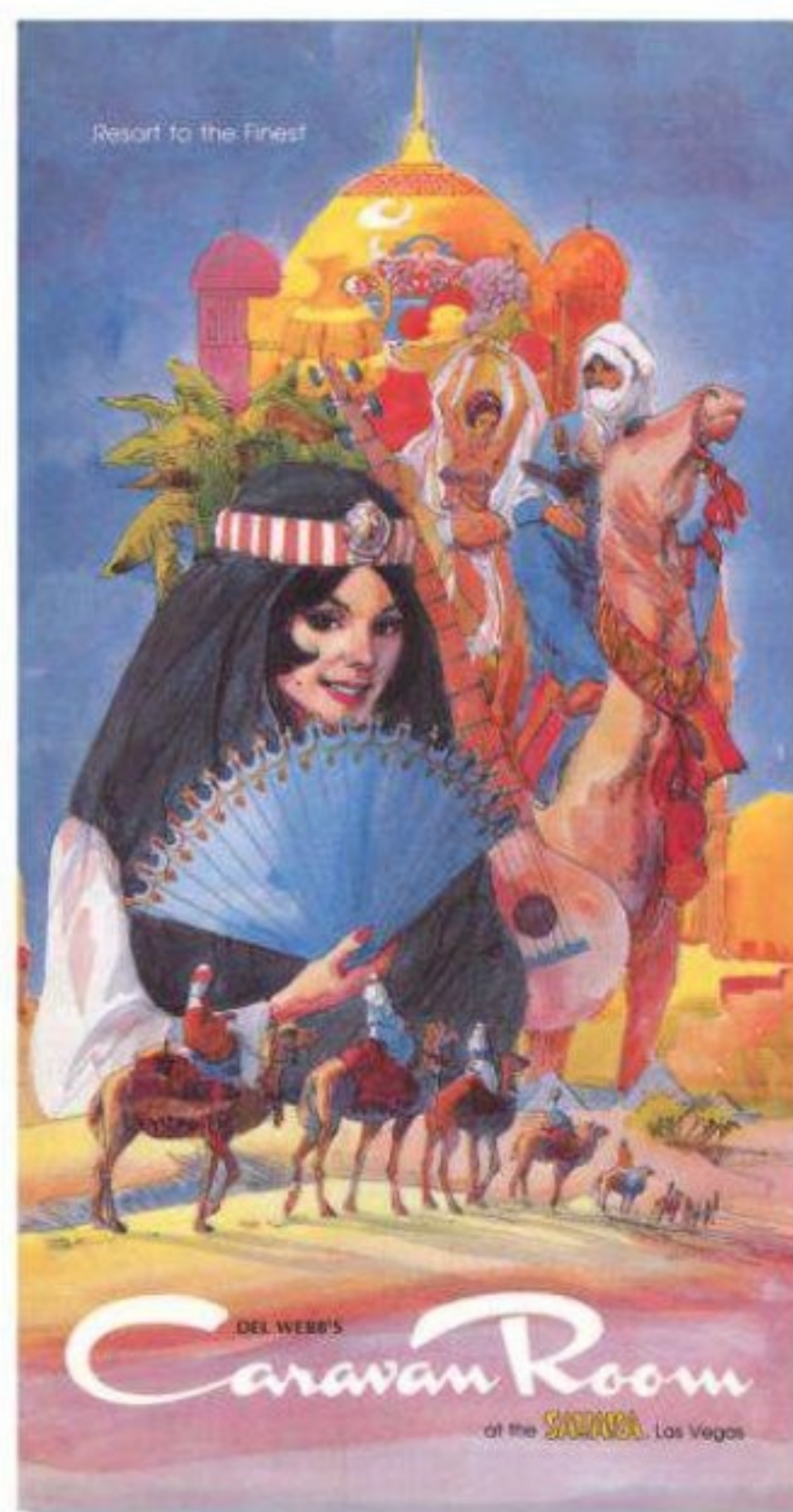
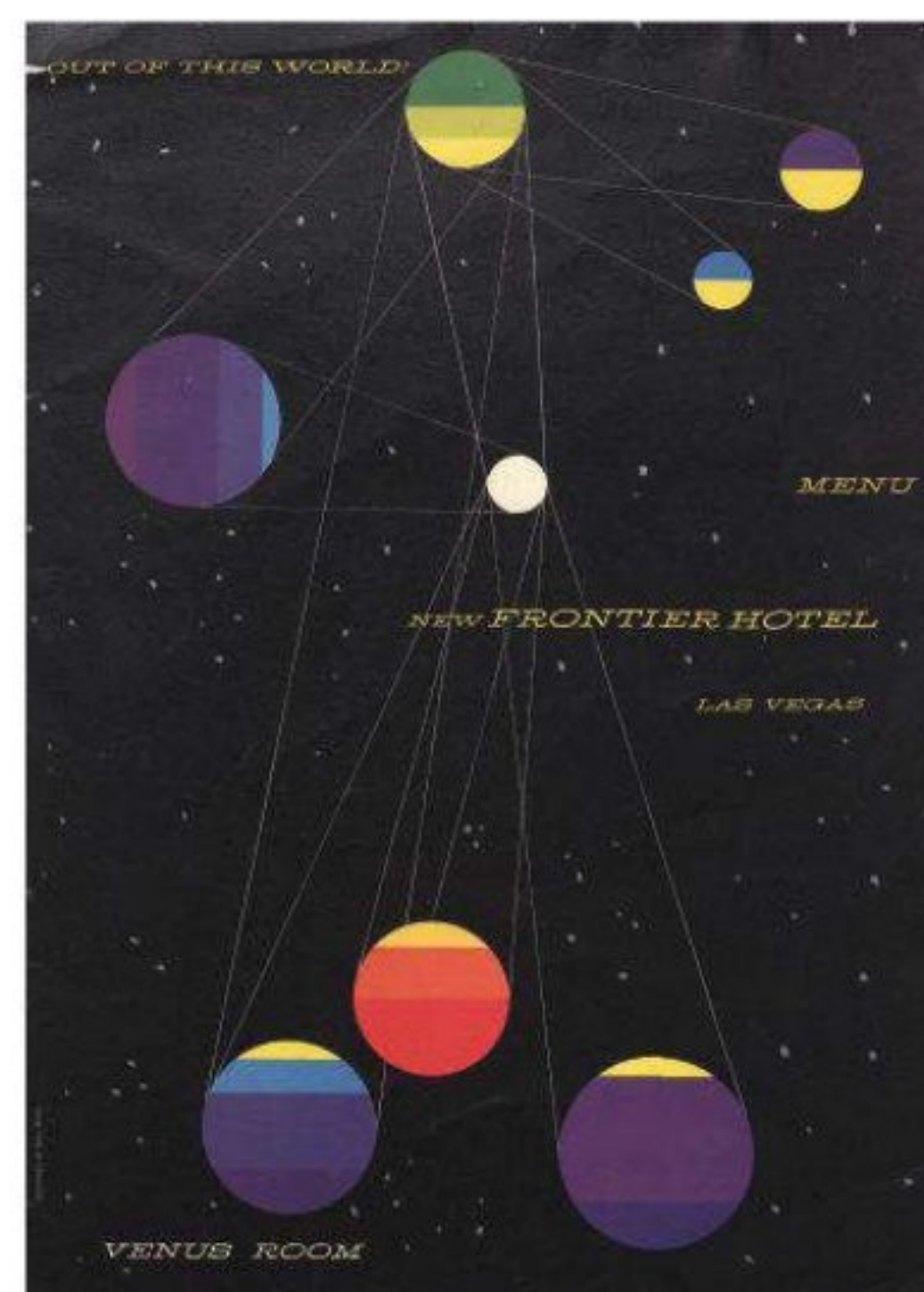
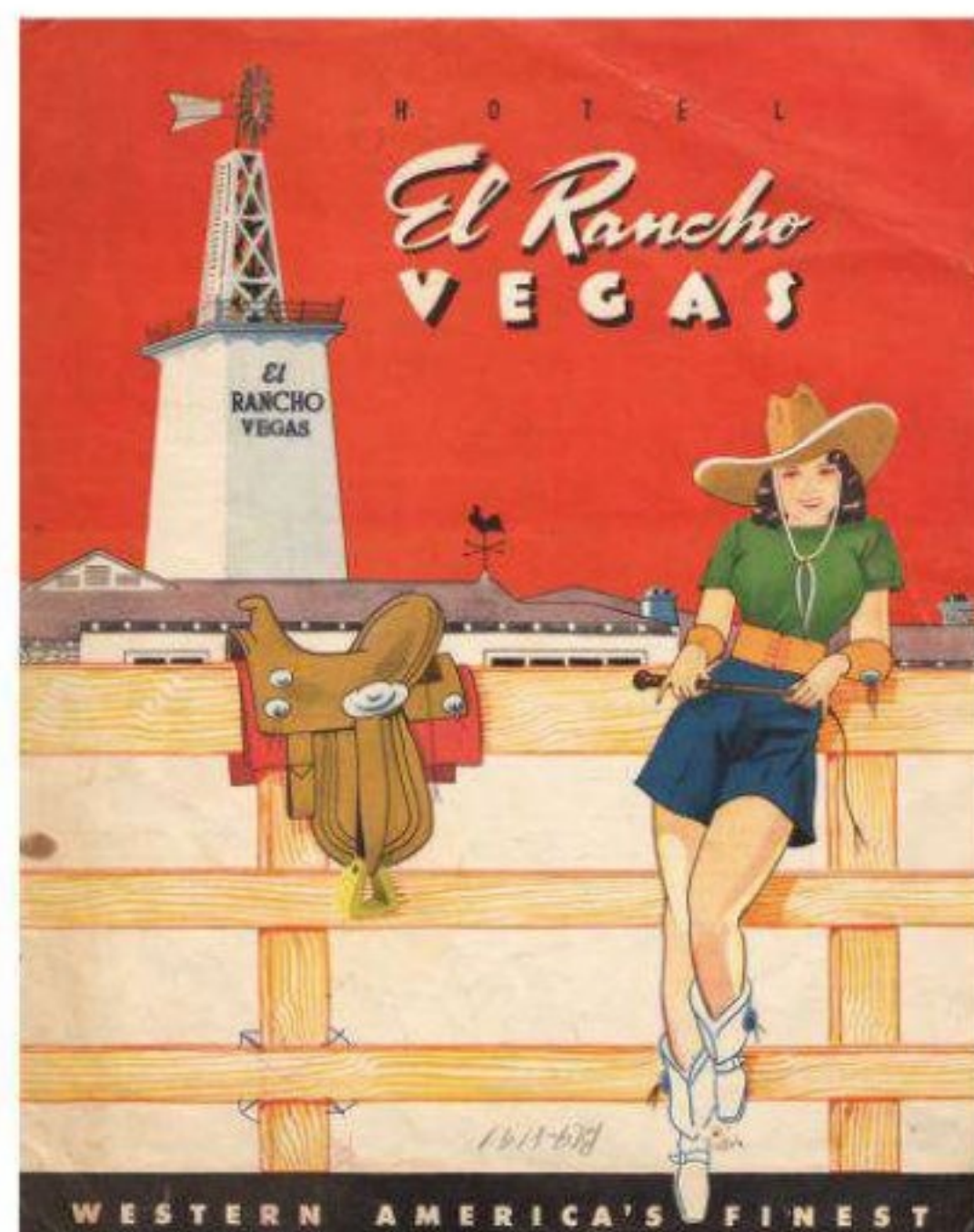
April

12-15

CAJUN HOT SAUCE FESTIVAL

New Iberia, Louisiana

This annual festival spices things up in sleepy New Iberia, eight miles from Avery Island, home to the makers of Tabasco, the Cajun hot sauce first produced back in 1868. The heat is »



Eating Las Vegas

A trove of vintage menus at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, showcases the aspirations and appetites of a city that has been feeding fantasies for seven decades. A cow-girl poses in front of the iconic windmill of **El Rancho Vegas** (above, top left), the Strip's first casino hotel, on a circa 1943 menu. Though it harkened back to Vegas's cow-town past, El Rancho was forward-thinking: Its "buckaroo buffets" set the stage for all-you-can-eat spreads to come, and its Round-Up Room pioneered Vegas dinner theater. By 1955, the Cold War was encroaching, and the nuclear arms and space race had become part of the city's idea of fun. Hotels threw viewing parties for atom bomb detonations at the Nevada Test Site, located 65 miles from the Strip, while the menu for the **Venus Room** (top right) in the New Frontier Hotel evoked the dream of interplanetary travel. **Bacchanal** (bottom right) at Caesars Palace, erected in 1966, cloaked Swinging Sixties hedonism in Roman garb. The belly dancer, camels, and casbah on the cover of a 1981 menu from the Sahara Hotel's **Caravan Room** (bottom left) belie the coffee-shop offerings within: "home style chili goodies" and—a true sign of the times—dishes from the Scarsdale Diet. —Meryl Rosofsky

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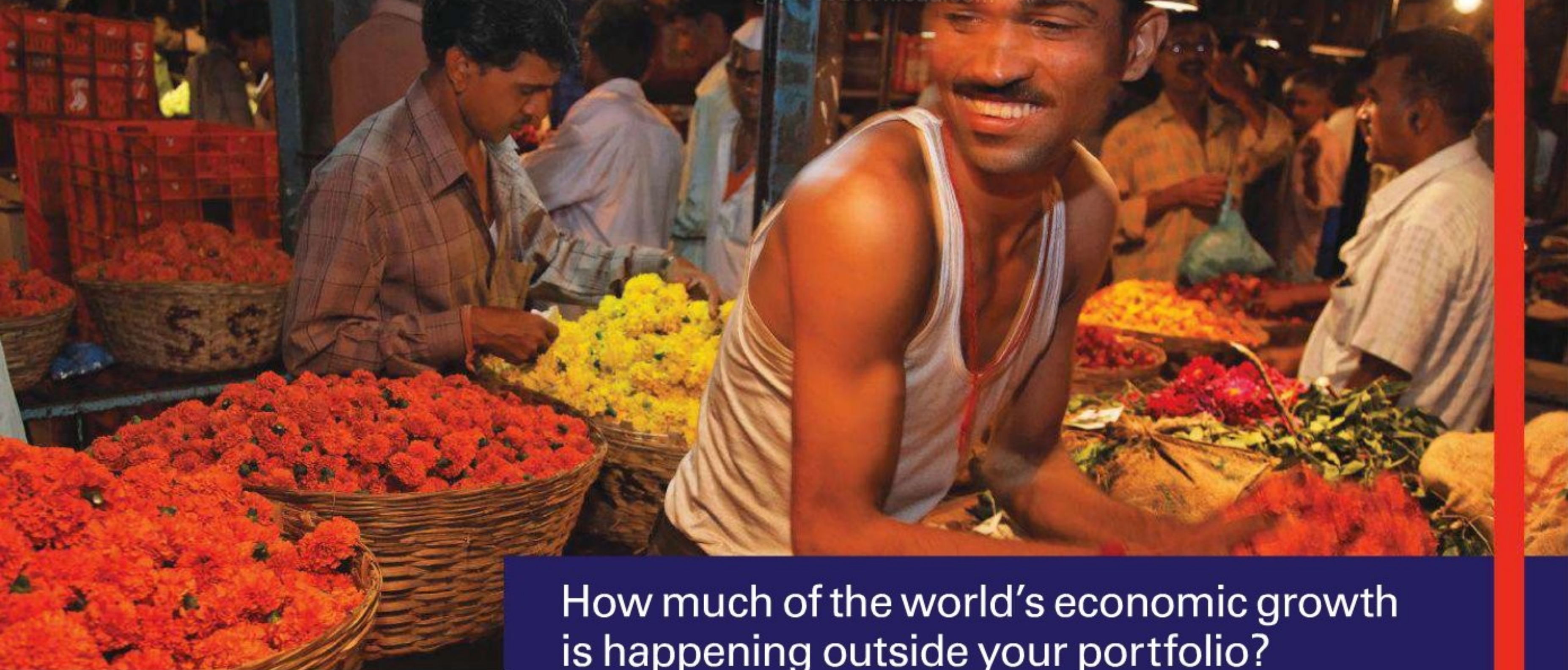




At Your Convenience

Finding myself thirsty on a trip to Montreal last year, I stepped into a convenience store on Rue Rachel, expecting standard-issue sodas and Molson beer. But past the Coke-crammed coolers in the small corner shop, called Dépanneur Peluso, I found a rear room containing more than 300 Quebec-brewed beers, neatly shelved by style. It was like peeking beyond the 7-Eleven Slurpee machine and discovering a treasure chest of rare and varied gems. Quebec's beer-making culture, I discovered, is a mash-up of traditions from France, Belgium, and Great Britain, the legacy of the province's diverse European colonists. I filled my cart with staff suggestions and returned to my hotel room for an impromptu tasting. Most of Quebec's 75-plus breweries don't sell beyond the border, but among the beers that I tried, a few favorites are available in the States: **1** L'abri De La Tempête Corps Mort, a potent bar-

leywine with a sticky-sweet caramel flavor, made with smoked barley that gives it a peaty, Scotch-like aroma; **2** hazy, foam-capped Unibroue Éphémère Apple, a Belgian-style white ale brewed with apple must for a quenching sourness that's cut by a bit of malt sweetness; **3** Microbrasserie Dieu Du Ciel! Rosée d'Hibiscus, a wheat beer that gets its rosy hue from an infusion of tangy, fragrant hibiscus flowers; **4** L'abri De La Tempête Corne de Brume, a silky Scottish ale with a salt-kissed toffee taste; **5** smooth, golden Brasseirie McAuslan St-Ambroise Apricot Wheat Ale, with a fruity, bready perfume, apricot and honey flavors, and a slight bitter finish; **6** Les Trois Mousquetaires Porter Baltique, a pitch-black porter that smells intensely of fudge and dark fruit and tastes like bittersweet chocolate cake. For information on where to buy these beers in the States, see page 85. —Joshua Bernstein



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»on, as spicy condiments across the nation compete for the top spot in a variety of categories. Just as intense is the competition among culinary teams in the jambalaya cookoff. Info: sugarena.com

April
13
BAISAKHI
FESTIVAL

Throughout Northern India

Among India's Sikhs, Baisakhi is a triple celebration: New Year's, the harvest, and the anniversary of the community's founding in 1699. Its zenith is a vegetarian lunch attended by thousands. *Karah prasad*, a "sacred pudding" made with semolina flour, is blessed and passed for dessert. The meal is followed by processions and dancing. Info: tourism-of-india.com

April
14–15
FESTIVAL DEL PUEBLO DEL
TOMATE

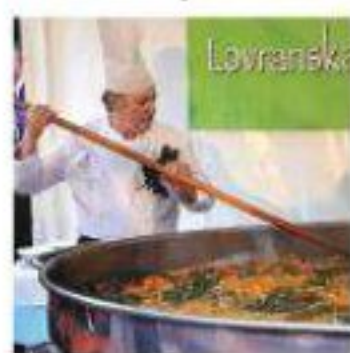
Jayuya, Puerto Rico

At this festival in Jayuya, Puerto Rico's "Town of Tomatoes," the local crop is fêted with events including a cooking contest. Last year's entries featured dishes like *tomates rellenos*, cheese-stuffed, batter-fried tomatoes; *dulce de tomate*, a cinnamon-scented sweet tomato jam; and *bizcocho de tomate*, a sweet cake made with tomato juice and flecked with raisins and walnuts. Info: puertorico.com

April
14–29
FESTIVAL ŠPARUGA

Lovran, Croatia

Wild asparagus grown on the coastal slopes of Croatia's Učka Mountains is delicately flavored, owing to mountain



and sea breezes. Lovran hosts an annual festival in the vegetable's honor during which restaurants feature local asparagus. But

the highlight is the *vela fritaja*, an enormous frittata made with 1,000 eggs and heaps of asparagus sautéed with *pršut* (dry-cured ham) in a 6.5-foot-diameter pan. Info: tz-lovran.hr

April
21–22
WORLD CLASS CRAB RACES,
FEED, AND DERBY

Westport, Washington

Singing, stomping, and other forms of crustacean persuasion steal the show at this Washington town's party, where handlers urge racing Dungeness crabs down the track by any means necessary. After the derby, a feast features—what else?—tons of crabmeat. Info: westport-grayland-chamber.org



Food of the Gods

In Bali, religious festivals begin with elaborate culinary sculptures

LIKE EVERY GIRL in Bali, I was taught how to make *banten*, food offerings, at an early age. We make thousands of different offerings; it's a key practice of Balinese Hinduism, which is influenced by veneration for the dead and the spiritual forces of nature. We use offerings to please the gods and our ancestors and to placate malevolent spirits. We make offerings to certain animals,

Clockwise from top left: a temple festival in Bali; offerings; a ceremony in 1969; an offering for Saraswati, goddess of knowledge.

trees, and objects. The biggest are created for holidays, for weddings and other rites of passage, for full and dark moons. These are made mainly by professionals, Brahmin women who specialize in the constructions required for a cremation, say, or for a tooth-filing ceremony. Some, called *ajuman*, are carried in baskets or bowls. Others, called *gebogan*, are formed around a banana tree trunk. Fruit, grilled chicken or duck, coconut, rice, palm leaves, and flowers are attached with bamboo skewers in rings of decreasing size to form a pyramid shape. The whole

thing—which can stretch nearly five feet high and weigh more than 40 pounds—is carried on the head of a woman to a temple. It's a spectacular sight, a procession of *gebogan*-carrying women. The offerings are presented to the deities, who partake of their essence. Afterward, worshippers can take them home to enjoy foods that have been touched by the gods. —Ni Wayan Murni

THE PANTRY, page 85: Info on purchasing *Ski Queen Gjetost* and *Boyd & Blair Potato Vodka*, visiting Bali, and more.

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Flower Power

Poppy seeds lend a rich, mysterious flavor to sweet and savory foods

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED POPPY SEEDS. My first taste of them came courtesy of my grandfather, Abram Gershenson, who brought a delicious repertoire of Eastern European baked goods with him from Russia to the U.S. when he emigrated with my grandmother, Klara, in 1979. My favorite among them was *mak pirog*, which translates literally as poppy seed pie, a yeast dough roulade swirled with a moist, black filling of ground poppy seeds, sugar, and raisins. I could gobble slice after slice without putting a dent in my appetite; my love for it was compulsive. Yet to this day, I have difficulty pinpointing the precise flavor of that filling: sweet and vaguely floral, but dark, too, with hints of earth and nuts. It's like no other food I know.

Even as a kid, I realized that poppy seeds, apart from their occasional scattering on a bagel or a kaiser roll, in a sweet vinaigrette, or in those ubiquitous lemon-cake muffins, didn't get much recognition. With the notable exception of *hamantaschen*, the triangle-shaped cookies with poppy seed filling I ate in Hebrew school every Purim, I rarely ate them outside our home. Even still, they became an object of affection.

A few years ago at Al Di Là, a fantastic Italian restaurant in Brooklyn, I discovered *casunziei*, beet ravioli in a poppy seed-flecked butter sauce. I was surprised to learn that it's one of many northern Italian dishes made with poppy seeds, a legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its cuisine, which has long used the seeds in sweet and savory ways. At home a few days later, I made a rich sauce for tagliatelle by heating poppy seeds in butter, along with shallots, wine, and cream. Their flavor bloomed in the fat, giving the entire dish a subtly woodsy taste.

But it wasn't until I was in the Czech Republic recently that I really came to understand what poppy seeds are and where they come from. The country is not only one of Europe's largest producers of poppy seeds,

but its cuisine has embraced them wholeheartedly—in yeast-dough pastries called *koláče*, sprinkled liberally over potato gnocchi and fruit-filled dumplings, as a filling for crêpes, and combined with blueberries and spread over a shortbread crust in *borůvkový koláč*, my favorite Czech pastry.

In the village of Ostředek, just southeast of Prague, I found myself standing waist-deep in a 100-acre field of *Papaver somniferum*, poppy plants. If I had come a few weeks earlier, they would have been in full bloom, papery petals of white streaked with lilac (the wild red poppies we tend to think of, *Papaver rhoeas*, do not produce seeds for culinary use). Instead, capping the tall, thick stems were spherical seedpods in an incandescent

Sweet and vaguely floral, but dark, too, with hints of earth and nuts, the poppy seed filling tasted like no other food I know

blue-green shade. The alarming color held a clue to the plants' other use: If the exterior of the pod is scored, the wound oozes white latex sap, better known as opium.

I broke open one of those pods, knocked out a handful of ruddy brown seeds into my palm, and stared with disbelief as they turned a cloudy lavender before my eyes, a response to the sudden oxidation. This, I learned, means the seeds aren't quite ripe. When they're ready to harvest, they emerge from the pod looking pretty much the way they do on a bagel: smoky blue-black. I tossed them into my mouth and savored their complex flavor: like legumes, like fresh peas, like hazelnuts, like flowers. The flavor is a contradiction—floral yet earthy, evanescent yet grounded.

Our taste for poppy seeds stretches back to pre-ancient times. According to Mark Merlin, author of *On The Trail of the*

Ancient Opium Poppy (Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1984), the cultivation of poppy seeds dates to the Neolithic period in Europe. White poppy seeds, from *Papaver somniferum album*, are most commonly used in Asia; they're smaller and milder tasting than the blue-black variety. I was particularly fascinated to read about the use of white poppy seeds in Bengali cuisine while reading *Eating India* (Bloomsbury USA, 2007), by food historian Chitrata Banerji. Their abundance in the region was linked to the rampant opium trade of the 18th and 19th centuries, when British colonists insisted that Bengali farmers turn their arable land over to farming poppies. Though the flowers were cultivated for narcotics, a by-product of the crop was poppy seeds, which Bengalis incorporated into their cuisine. In one classic Bengali dish, *aloo posto*, potatoes are cooked with a fine paste made from poppy and mustard seeds puréed with garlic, chile, water, and salt. Even combined with those strong flavors, the singular, nutty, vaguely floral taste of the poppy seeds comes through.

I noticed one thing that this dish has in common with my beloved *mak pirog*: the grinding of the seeds. Though plenty of recipes call for seeds to be added whole, which lends color, crunch, and mellow earthy flavor, grinding the seeds releases their fragrant oil, which makes for a moister, more intensely flavored filling. I learned later in life why my grandfather didn't make *mak pirog* for every visit: It's a lot of work. To make the filling, he would soak the poppy seeds in water overnight to soften the crunchy hull, and then process them twice through a meat grinder, releasing as much of the oil as possible. He would next simmer the seeds with water and sugar, and then raisins, stirring until they absorbed the liquid and clung together, like fertile soil. It was dark, mysterious, delicious—everything I love about poppy seeds. 🐾



Up close, poppy seeds reveal their dappled color, kidney-bean shape, and honeycomb-like texture.

Borůvkový Koláč

(Blueberry-Poppy Seed Squares)

SERVES 12

The floral character of poppy seeds shines when paired with blueberries in this rich dessert. Store any unused seeds in the refrigerator or freezer.

- 20 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, plus more for pan
- 3 cups flour, plus more for pan
- 1½ cups sugar
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. vanilla
- 4 cups blueberries
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1½ cups ground poppy seeds (see page 85)
- ½ cup heavy cream

1 Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour a 9" x 13" metal baking pan; set aside. Beat 16 tbsp. butter and ½ cup sugar on medium-high speed of a mixer until pale and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add 2½ cups flour and ½ tsp. salt; beat until just combined. Press dough into bottom and half-way up sides of prepared pan; chill for 20 minutes. Bake crust until lightly browned, about 12 minutes; let cool. Meanwhile, stir remaining butter, flour, and salt, ¼ cup sugar, and vanilla in a bowl until coarse crumbles form; set streusel aside.

2 Heat remaining sugar, 3 cups blueberries, lemon juice, and cinnamon in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; cook until berries burst, about 20 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in remaining berries; let cool. Stir together poppy seeds and cream in a bowl; spread evenly over cooled crust. Pour blueberry mixture over poppy seeds; sprinkle with streusel mixture. Bake until filling is bubbly and streusel is lightly browned,

about 40 minutes. Let cool, cut into squares, and serve.

Mak Pirog

(Poppy Seed Strudel)

MAKES 2 LOAVES

Filled with a moist, sweet poppy seed paste, this rustic yeast-dough roulade is a comfort food eaten throughout Eastern and Central Europe.

- 6 tbsp. milk, heated to 115°, plus ⅓ cup
- 1 ¼-oz. package active dry yeast
- ¾ cup sugar
- ¼ cup canola oil, plus more for greasing
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 egg, plus 1 egg yolk
- 2 cups flour
- ¾ cup ground poppy seeds (see page 85)
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter
- Zest of ½ lemon
- ¼ tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 egg yolk mixed with 1 tbsp. heavy cream, for egg wash
- Whole poppy seeds, to garnish

1 Make the dough: Whisk together 6 tbsp. heated milk and yeast in a bowl; let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Whisk in ¼ cup sugar, the oil, 1 tsp. salt, and the egg and yolk; add flour, and stir until dough forms. Transfer to a floured work surface; knead until smooth, about 6 minutes. Transfer to a lightly greased bowl and cover with plastic wrap; let sit until doubled in size, about 2 hours. Punch down dough; cover, and let sit until puffed, about 1 hour.

2 Meanwhile, make the filling: Heat remaining milk, sugar, and salt, and ground poppy seeds, butter, and zest in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; cook, stirring, until

thickened and smooth, about 4 minutes. Stir in vanilla, and let cool.

3 Heat oven to 350°. Punch down the dough, and halve it; transfer each half to a work surface and, using a rolling pin, flatten each into a 10" x 14" rectangle. Spread half the poppy seed filling over each rectangle and fold the longer sides 1" toward the center; starting from one short side, fold up rectangles into 3"-4"-wide flat loaves. Transfer loaves, seam side down, to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, and brush tops with egg wash; sprinkle with whole poppy seeds. Bake until golden brown, about 20 minutes.

Poppy Seed Dressing

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

Popularized by Texas cookbook author Helen Corbitt in the 1950s, this sweet-tart vinaigrette, enriched with poppy seeds, is perfect for a salad of butter lettuce.

- 2 tbsp. poppy seeds
- ½ cup sugar
- ⅓ cup white wine vinegar
- 2 tsp. dry mustard powder
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 small yellow onion, finely grated, juice reserved
- ¾ cup canola oil
- ¼ cup olive oil

Heat a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add poppy seeds, and cook, swirling pan constantly, until lightly toasted and fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add sugar, vinegar, mustard, salt, pepper, and onion with juice, and cook, stirring constantly, until sugar dissolves and mixture begins to simmer. Remove from heat and

transfer to a blender. Add both oils, and blend until smooth; chill.

Tagliatelle with Poppy Seeds and Prosciutto

SERVES 4-6

Poppy seeds lend their toasty aroma to this creamy pasta dish, based on one served by chef Matthew Accarrino at SPQR in San Francisco.

- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large shallots, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. poppy seeds
- ½ cup white wine
- ½ cup buttermilk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 lb. tagliatelle or fettucine
- 2 oz. prosciutto, thinly sliced
- ½ cup finely grated Parmesan, plus more to garnish
- 4 scallions, cut into ½" slices
- Juice of ½ lemon

Heat butter and oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots. Season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 2 minutes. Add poppy seeds; cook, stirring, until fragrant and shallots begin to brown lightly, about 3 minutes. Add wine; cook until almost all liquid evaporates, about 5 minutes. Add buttermilk and cream; cook, stirring, until reduced slightly, about 3 minutes. Meanwhile, bring a pot of salted water to a boil; add pasta, and cook until al dente, about 7 minutes. Drain pasta, reserving a little cooking water, and add to sauce in skillet. Add prosciutto, Parmesan, half the scallions, and lemon juice; toss to combine, adding water if necessary to make a smooth sauce. Season with salt and pepper, and transfer to a serving dish; sprinkle with remaining scallions and more Parmesan.

The World of Poppy Seeds

All poppy seeds are harvested from seedpods, like the ones pictured at right. There's the floral-tasting blue-black European variety (*Papaver somniferum*), the sweeter brown Turkish type (*Papaver somniferum nigrum*), and small, mild white poppy seeds (*Papaver somniferum album*; pictured at left), which are common in Asian cooking. (Because of their high oil content, whole poppy seeds should be stored in the



freezer to preserve their freshness.) In many Indian dishes, white poppy seeds are pounded into spice pastes for curries; they also add nutty depth to desserts and sweet beverages. In Japan, white poppy seeds are often a component of the seasoning mix called *shichimi togarashi*, which includes *sansho* pepper, sesame seeds, and other spices. In East-

ern Europe, cooks use grinders designed to crush the seeds and release their flavorful oils, an important step in making the sweet paste featured in so many of the region's pastries. These sweet fillings are sold in cans (pictured at left) and they can be made with ground poppy seeds (pictured at right). There's also poppy seed oil, which makes for a nutty-tasting vinaigrette. —G.G.



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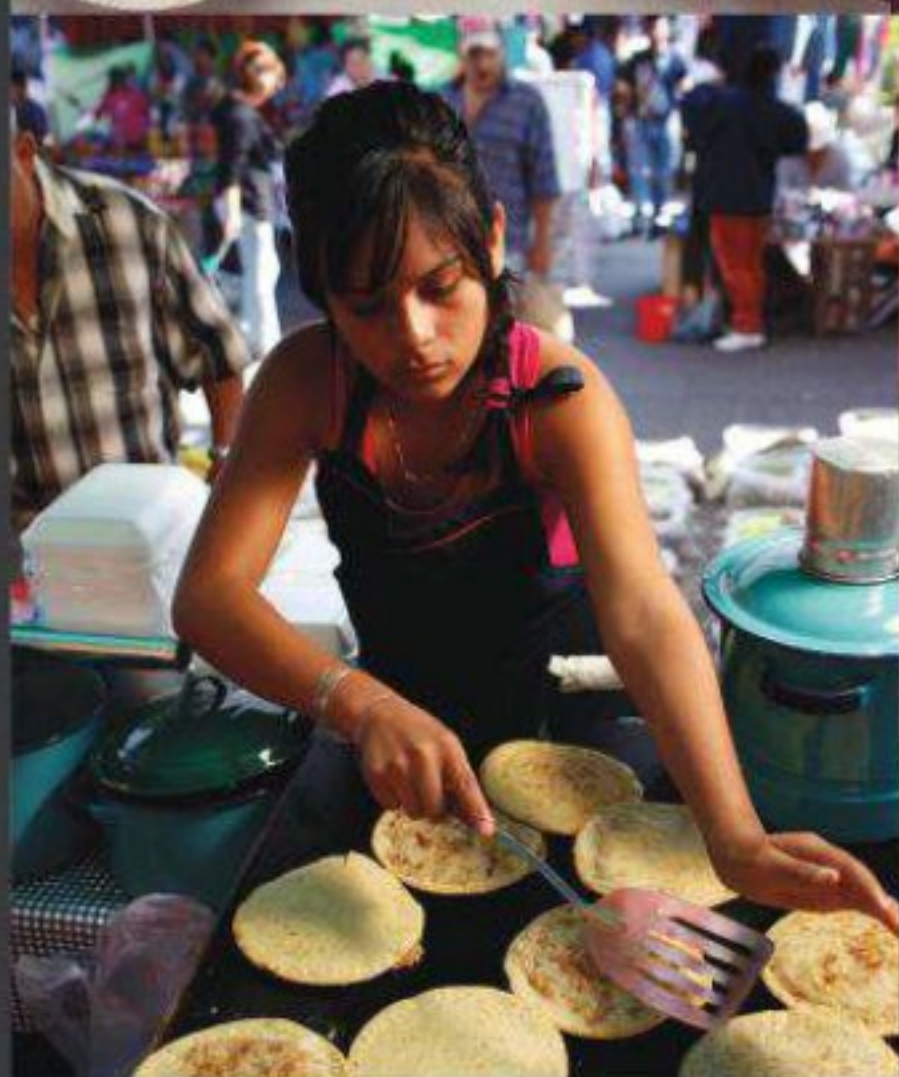
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CLASSIC

Spanish Conquest

Ropa vieja, Cuba's classic braised beef dish, has traveled far and wide

BY KATHLEEN SQUIRES

THE NAME IMMEDIATELY caught my interest: *ropa vieja*. Translation: “old clothes.” We were at a Cuban restaurant in Miami many years ago, and my husband, who’s from Puerto Rico, explained that it was a delicious beef stew he knew from back home. If it’s so delicious, I wondered, why would it have such an unappetizing name?

When my plate arrived, I felt the label was even more unjust. The dish consisted of shredded beef, stewed with onion and peppers, as tender as can be with a long-cooked tangy

Cuban-style *ropa vieja* (see page 28 for a recipe).

tomato flavor. Olives and capers added a subtle salinity, and the whole was flecked with fresh and dried herbs and served with a big pile of fluffy rice, tinted yellow with annatto. After that meal it became my go-to Cuban dish, until I realized it wasn’t Cuban at all.

This realization happened on a recent trip to the Canary Islands, located west of Morocco but belonging to Spain since the 1400s. We were exploring Mercado de Nuestra Señora de Africa, a peach-colored Spanish colonial structure full of produce vendors in the port city of Santa Cruz de Tenerife. When we bellied up to the bar at one of the market’s food stalls, El

Chiringuito, I was shocked to find my favorite Cuban stew on the menu. I asked our server why they served this Cuban specialty, and she wagged her finger at me and smiled.

“We created this dish, not the Cubans,” the woman said, firmly. When my *ropa vieja* arrived, it was meaty, soft, and tangy, but there were marked differences from the dish I knew. It contained shredded pork and chicken, as well as beef, with a generous lacing of plump

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TODD COLEMAN

chickpeas. Instead of the rice accompaniment I was accustomed to, the stew was ladled atop fried potato cubes. I loved the seasoned, succulent meat as much as I did in the Cuban version, but I had so many questions: How did the dish come to be? How did it get to Cuba? And why was it called “old clothes”?

TO FIND THE ANSWERS, I paid a visit to Cesar González, a native of Tenerife and executive chef at El Mirador at the Abama hotel. He laughed as he told me the local folklore surrounding the dish’s roots. “There was once a man so poor, he couldn’t afford to feed his children,” he said. “He became so desperate that he cooked old clothes as if they were meat. He gave so much love in the process that it magically turned into a delicious stew.” (Everyone I queried recounted a similar story.)

González serves two versions: One is his grandmother’s recipe—a bright, sweet, peppery, colorful concoction—and the other is a modernized riff, where the chickpeas are manipulated into a hummuslike purée and the shredded meat is served in dainty portions.


Ropa vieja is still very much a household staple in the Canary Islands, and you can find it in marketplaces, take-out counters of grocery stores, working-class restaurants, and especially at *guachinches*, casual eateries in the local wineries that serve traditional food. I learned that the dish was created as a way to take advantage of the leftovers from making *puchero*, the islands’ classic vegetable soup. *Puchero* was traditionally made in the morning, and by lunch, the meat used to flavor the stock would be falling into shreds. Cooks would strain it from the soup and sauté it with *frituar*, the aromatic base made with onions, peppers, garlic, tomato paste, and seasonings that’s known as *sofrito* in much of the Latin world. Chickpeas from the soup were added to the meat, and that hearty mixture was served atop fried potatoes.

Although the dish is made with new-world ingredients such as tomatoes, potatoes, and peppers, Canarian food writer Manuel Iglesias told me that the cooking style stretches back to the Romans. “Their recipes always started with a giant pot of stew,” he said. “Then the ingredients in the stew were used in different ways.”

But what interested me even more than the ancient predecessors of *ropa vieja* was how it crossed the Atlantic, and what happened next. The dish likely migrated to Cuba, along with tens of thousands of Canarians, in the 19th century. The earliest-known documentation of *ropa vieja*’s presence there appeared in an 1857 cookbook, *Nuevo Manual del Cocinero Cubano y Español*, where the recipe is curiously cited as

“American-style,” likely for its lack of potatoes and chickpeas. The dropping of potatoes made sense; rice was Cuba’s most common starch. But no one can account for how the chickpeas became lost at sea, since they were already a staple of Cuban cuisine. Perhaps it was an early show of independence from Spain?

When Cuban culture came to the States, the “old clothes” came too. Nowadays it’s a staple at restaurants in Miami—from Versailles, the 41-year-old political hub of Cuban expats, to the not-so-coincidentally named Islas Canarias (around half a million people of Canarian descent currently call Miami home). It pervades Latino cookbooks, from Nitza Villapol’s 1954 Cuban culinary bible, *Cocina Criolla*, to a Crock-Pot version in actress Eva Longoria’s *Eva’s Kitchen* (Clarkson Potter, 2011). In Cuba, though, you’d be hard-pressed to find *ropa vieja* in homes today, since beef is tightly restricted by the government. “No one—no one!—can slaughter cattle. It must be turned over to the state,” a Cuba-based diplomat told me. But the Cuban dish has spread across the Caribbean, from Puerto Rico to Venezuela (where it’s known as *pabellón*) to Panama.

Like so many dishes rooted in resourcefulness, this one is so beloved that cooks have figured out ways to make it even if they don’t have leftovers on hand or time to make stock from scratch. When I make the Cuban version, I sear the beef, and then put it in a slow cooker with water, tomatoes, peppers, and onions. The result is just as delicious, and as comforting as wearing some of my favorite old clothes. 

Canaries-Style Ropa Vieja

SERVES 6–8

Chickpeas and raisins flavor this meaty stew, which is served with cubed, sautéed potatoes.

- 4 oz. bacon, roughly chopped
- 1 lb. flank steak, cut into 1½"-thick strips
- 1 lb. pork shoulder, cut into 2" pieces
- 8 oz. bone-in, skinless chicken thighs
- Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste
- 1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, stemmed, thinly sliced
- 1 dried chile de arbol, stemmed
- 1 tbsp. ground cumin
- 1 tbsp. paprika
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 cups beef stock
- 1 16-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes, crushed
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 16-oz. can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
- 3 tbsp. finely chopped fresh oregano
- 3 tbsp. finely chopped fresh parsley

Render bacon in a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Transfer bacon to a plate, leaving fat in pot. Season steak, pork, and chicken with salt and pepper. Working in batches, cook until browned on both sides, about 6 minutes; transfer to plate. Add onion, pepper, and chile; cook until soft, about 4 minutes. Add cumin, paprika, and garlic; cook for 2 minutes. Add wine; cook, scraping bottom of pot, for 1 minute. Return bacon and meats to pot with stock and tomatoes; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered, until all meat is very tender, 2–3 hours. Remove meats and shred (discard chicken bones); return to pot with raisins and chickpeas. Cook until sauce is slightly thickened, about 8 minutes. Stir in oregano and parsley before serving.

Cuban-Style Ropa Vieja

SERVES 6–8

This *ropa vieja* version (pictured on page 27) is made with beef and accented with olives and capers.

- 6 oz. bacon, roughly chopped
- 2 lb. flank steak, cut into 1½" strips
- Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste
- 1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 Cubanelle or green pepper, thinly sliced
- 6 oz. tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. cumin
- 1 tbsp. dried thyme
- 1 tbsp. dried oregano
- 5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 cups beef stock
- 1 16-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes, crushed
- ½ cup halved, pitted green olives
- ⅓ cup sliced jarred pimiento peppers
- 3 tbsp. capers, rinsed and drained
- 1 tbsp. white wine vinegar
- ¼ cup roughly chopped cilantro

Render bacon in a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Transfer to a plate, leaving fat in pot. Season steak with salt and pepper. Working in batches, cook until browned on both sides, about 6 minutes; transfer to plate. Add onion and peppers; cook until soft, about 4 minutes. Add tomato paste, cumin, thyme, oregano, garlic, and bay leaf; cook until lightly caramelized, about 3 minutes. Add wine; cook, scraping bottom of pot, for 1 minute. Return bacon and steak to pot with stock and tomatoes; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook, covered, until steak is very tender, 2–3 hours. Remove steak, and shred; return meat to pot with olives, pimientos, capers, and vinegar. Cook until sauce is slightly thickened, about 30 minutes. Stir in cilantro before serving.

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ISLANDS** 

Magic Mushrooms

Morels are a fleeting pleasure

BY LARRY NIGHSWANDER



EACH SPRING AS A CHILD in Ohio, I would take walks with my grandfather through the woods near his home in search of morel mushrooms. These delectable fungi briefly poke their honeycombed heads out of the ground for a few weeks to spread their spores, usually in early spring, and then return to the earth until the following year. Morels don't take well to cultivation, so the limited time to enjoy the wild treasures charged the activity with the urgency of an Easter egg hunt.

Like most serious morel pickers, my grandfather never disclosed his secret spot to other foragers. But as his initiate, I knew that they thrived in moist areas, near logs or dying trees, once the weather turned warm. We'd fill our paper bags with black morels, *Morchella elata*, which possess a robust, earthy flavor, as well as yellow ones, *Morchella esculenta*, which are larger, with a gentler woodsy taste.

Though we waited patiently for the morels to appear, once we had them, we ate them quickly. Our preparation was simple: We'd wash the mushrooms thoroughly, soak them in saltwater for half an hour, halve them, dredge them in flour, fry them in butter, and season them with salt and pepper. (Morels must be eaten cooked; eating them raw can cause an upset stomach.) The meaty, bite-size fritters were addictive. Morels are also wonderful in soups, and impart deep, savory flavor to sauces for everything from pasta to roast chicken.

When I moved away from Ohio, I lost touch with these springtime delicacies. That is, until I discovered Earthy Delights. This purveyor of specialty foods based in DeWitt, Michigan, sells morels gathered by foragers in California, Oregon, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana, and can deliver them within three to four days of picking. Buying morels doesn't replicate the time I spent with my grandfather, but I always think of him when I eat them. Morels cost \$29 to \$49 per pound. To order, call 800/367-4709 or visit earthy.com. 🍄

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The Professional

For a career waiter, it's not just a job, it's a calling

BY PASCALE LE DRAOULEC

UNTIL THE AGE OF SEVEN, I thought my father was a movie star. He left the house every day wearing a tuxedo and whistling Yves Montand. He returned every night with pockets full of money. Edmond Louis Le Draoulec was a waiter. Not the kind who keeps a screenplay in his sock drawer, but a career waiter—right down to his collection of satin cummerbunds.

My father lived to seduce diners with his expertise and tableside charm. He felt that every meal was special, and had little patience for those who didn't see waitering as an art. This set the course for my life as a food writer. I turned down the job of restaurant critic at the *New York Daily News* twice because I didn't want to tell people not to go to a restaurant. When I finally accepted in 2001, I imagined my parents as the diners I would write to, people who cherished every meal and every dime.

From the early 1960s through the late 1990s, my father worked in some of Los Angeles's most celebrated dining rooms: Scandia, The Saloon, The Ambassador Hotel. Each morning before school, he would regale my sister and me with tales from his shift: "The chef was so angry, he flung a bread roll at Mario!" "The hostess is giving Jean-Louis all the best tables, *c'est louche*." "The paparazzi were out in full force last night." While he spoke, my mother would brush his tuxedo jacket, which smelled of shrimp scampi, cigarettes, and cologne. First, she'd scatter the contents of the pockets on the table: champagne corks, breath mints, the occasional escargot shell (for his girls), and, of course, cash. My father would interrupt his narrative to tell her about the *canard à l'orange* or Dover sole he'd brought home for our lunches.

In 1941, Edmond and his parents fled occupied Brittany and hid on the tiny island of Porquerolles, in Provence, and food was scarce. He likes to tell the story of the day he stumbled upon a barrel of lard that had washed ashore, presumably from a sunken warship. It may as well have been a pot of gold, he says, because they could use it to fry potatoes. I've wondered if his career had to do with silencing that growling stomach.

Living with his parents in Nice, at 16, my father took a summer job as *garçon de café* at a beachside terrace. Instead of going back to school, he signed up for fine-dining training at a hotel in Evian, France. He never looked back. In 1960, he crossed the Atlantic to work at the swank Beaver Club in Montreal. There, he met my mother, Lucette, also fresh off

the boat from France. She, too, had known hunger. He took her out for a steak dinner but he was so smitten, he couldn't eat. Lucette directed her fork at his T-bone: "May I?" They were married six months later.

Edmond and Lucette bought an old Chevrolet and followed Route 66 until they reached Santa Monica, California. They found an apartment the day they arrived, after which my father went out for a smoke. He poked his head inside a restaurant called The San Francisco and

was hired on the spot. Finding a job was never a problem. The network of French expat waiters was thick. Keeping one was another story. One chef fired him for refusing to deliver a New York strip he deemed overcooked. He was dismissed from another restaurant for trying to unionize, and yet another for passing the bartender pilfered steaks.

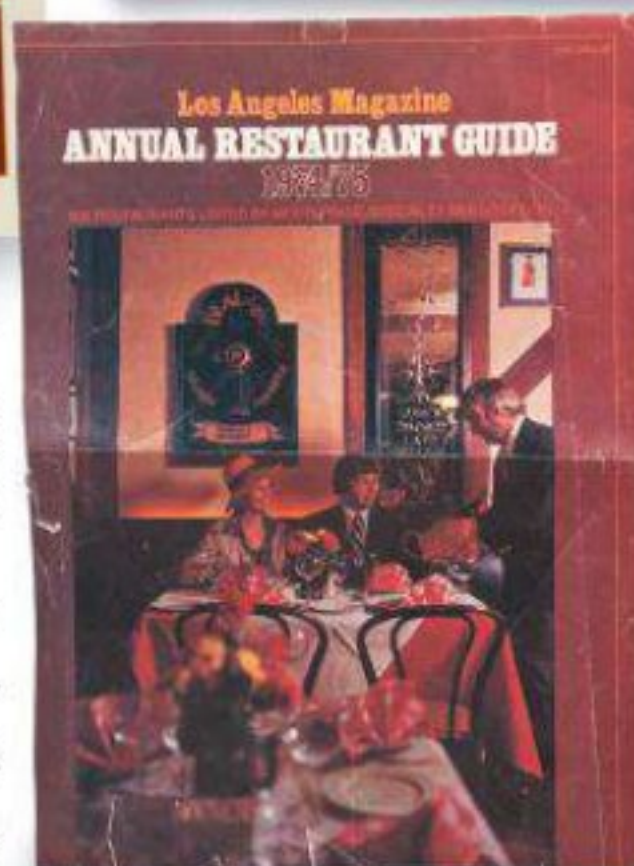
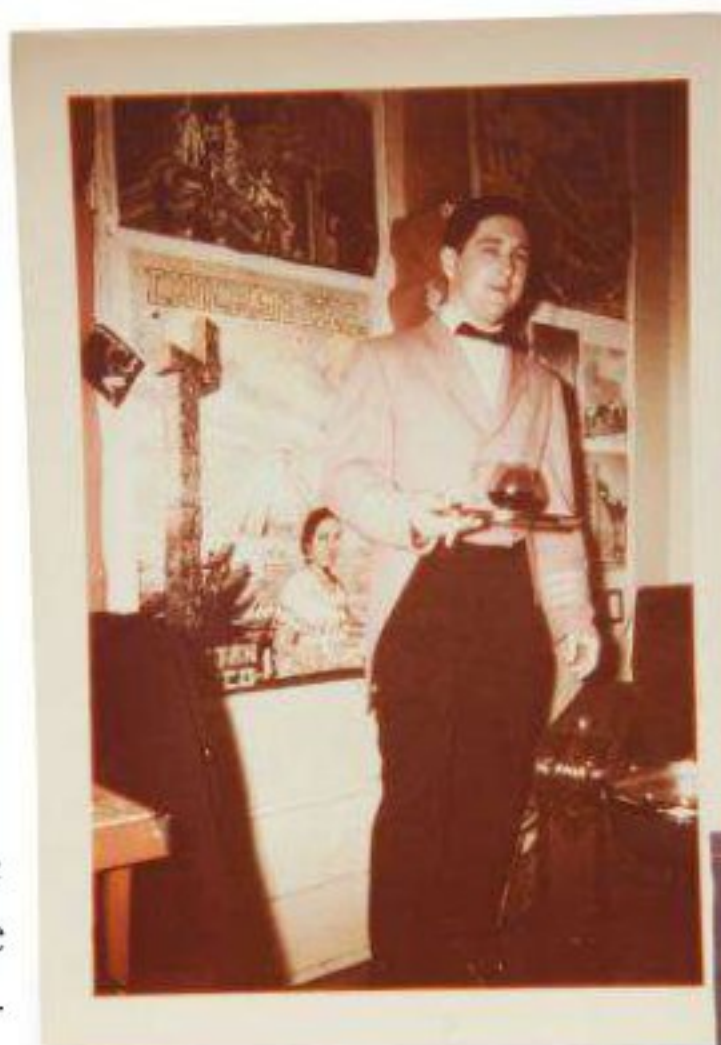
Yet there were places where he stayed put, and despite the odd hours, my father was a family man. During the Scandia years, we would go camping at Leo Carrillo State Park, near Malibu. He couldn't take time off, so he would swim with us by day, slip into his tux, and drive to work in the afternoon. The first thing I'd see the next morning was his uniform hanging from the branch of a sycamore.

My father developed close relationships with many of his regulars, who showed their appreciation by slipping him cash. While he felt no guilt swiping a lobster from the walk-

in, my father was fanatical about sharing tips with the other waiters. Some tips were priceless. When my mother was diagnosed with cancer at 63, one of my father's customers, a doctor, got her the best surgeon.

By the time I became a critic, my father's health had declined and he wasn't able to travel much. Still, I felt him there with me, night after night, condemning a mere fish soup that dared call itself bouillabaisse, or praising the bartender who had bothered to float a lemon zest in my Kir. On his last visit to New York, he joined me on a review of Thomas Keller's Per Se. The service was flawless. I wanted so badly to tell our waiter that he was in the presence of a pro. But by then, long retired, my father was ready to be fawned over. That was gift enough. ✍️

Clockwise from left: Edmond Le Draoulec dressed for work at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal in 1960; second from right, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles in 1976; in *Los Angeles Magazine* in 1975.



PASCALE LE DRAOULEC won the James Beard Foundation Award for restaurant reviewing in 2002. This is her first story for SAVEUR.



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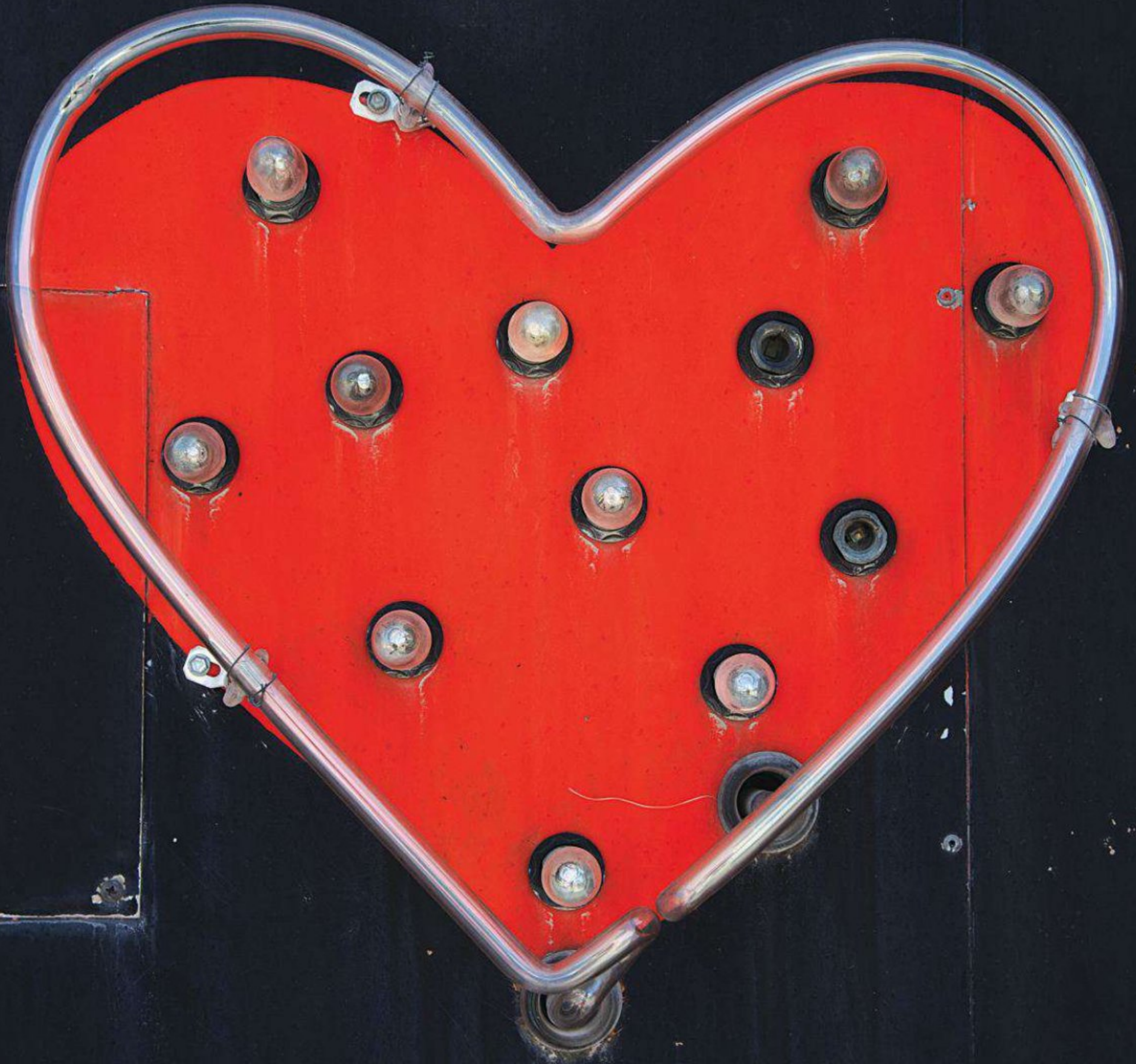
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Vegas

Viewed from the air, the approach to Las Vegas is all hazy blue atmosphere and rose-colored rock. To see a shimmering city materialize in this martian landscape seems an impossibility—an impression reinforced by a drive down Las Vegas Boulevard, past a volcano, an Eiffel Tower, a colossal pyramid. As dusk descends, a luminous grid fanning out in every direction traces the outlines of a booming population drawn here from all over the planet. No appetite need go unsatisfied; good food is central to Las Vegas's sense of itself. That's true whether you're a celebrated Cantonese chef at one of the Strip's grandest properties or a family from Mexico City dishing up home-style cooking in a strip mall on South Eastern Avenue. It's a place that functions according to a kind of dream logic. Anything might happen. —*The Editors*

LONDON NORDEMAN

Opposite, a defunct neon sign from Las Vegas's past, one of more than 150 such displays collected at the Neon Museum and Boneyard in Las Vegas.

WHERE THE WORLD'S BEST CHEFS ARE HAVING THE TIMES OF THEIR LIVES

BEYOND THE BUFFETS AND chain eateries and boozy bacchanals, Twist by Pierre Gagnaire is a restaurant that demonstrates how much Las Vegas dining has evolved. In the past dozen years, the world's top chefs have made their indelible mark on the city. Among them are more than a few Frenchmen: Alain Ducasse, Guy Savoy, Joël Robuchon, and since 2009, Gagnaire, with his enthralling restaurant in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

In its elegant contradictions, Twist shows why France's most noted toques love Las Vegas. On the one hand, the food of Vegas is so particular that it feels French in an offhand way. On the other hand, Gagnaire insists that Twist's dishes "possess eccentricity." What better place to flaunt eccentricity than Las Vegas? The restaurant lives up to its name, upending every expectation, gracefully, deliciously. Order the "zezette broth," and you don't just get broth; you get a mushroom and coconut soup infused with an abundance of fragrant herbs, plump vegetable gnocchi, and chicken chiffonade floating within. With it comes a cod cake tangy with Kaffir lime, and *bavaroise* flavored like ratatouille atop a

ruby-colored bloody mary sorbet.

There seems no outward reason for this hodgepodge. The dishes are beautifully presented in a mosaic, but don't seem to go together. Then you taste, and the alchemy of so many textures, so many varying temperatures, so many flavors of herb and acid and sea and earth, is out of this world—and so precisely of this world that it seems to express the very essence of the food. You feel shaken awake. Your taste buds perk up. And so does your mood. Gagnaire understands Las Vegas; he's having fun here.

"Twist," he says, "means to turn things around, to unscrew them, to liberate, to have a different approach to traditional or normal dishes. I respect tradition, but with my own rules." Would that we could all play by our own rules in Vegas.

—James Oseland

A collection of sweets that comprise a single dessert order, at Twist by Pierre Gagnaire.

Muscavado sugar tuile with hojicha tea-flavored sugar-glass "opaline," citron-flavored royal icing, and matcha green tea powder atop an orange-saffron syrup

LONDON NORDEMAN



*Crème brûlée ice cream atop
caramelized pineapple soaked
in crème de cassis*

*A granité of green apple and
lime topped with a cinnamon-
dusted confit of apples and
apple-flavored "opaline"*

*A chocolate biscuit cake soaked
in grappa, topped with ginger
sorbet and served in a pool of
banana coulis*

Vegas, Al Fresco

IN 1976 MY MOTHER, Patricia, and my father, Jimmie, met at Las Vegas's Desert Springs Hospital, where they both worked as nurses. Their first date was a picnic at Lake Mead, 25 miles east of the Strip. The fare was not gourmet: Ritz crackers, Cheese Whiz, Pepsi-Cola. But it launched an Evans family tradition. Like most locals, we have a wild enthusiasm for the man-made theatricality of Vegas, but once off the Strip, driving along Boulder Highway to the lake or hopping on the 215 en route to magnificent Red Rock Canyon, just 15 miles from the city, we fall fast for the natural landscape. It's no secret that Las Vegas sits in the Mojave Desert. Sometimes we hike off the trails, competitively trying to spot roadrunners or big-horned sheep. But as we settle into lunch—nowadays it's more likely to be herb-grilled chicken, say, with red onion jam (see page 76 for a recipe), and angel food cupcakes with liqueur-soaked berries, and always lots of bottled water—we're so stunned by the crimson-hued sandstone that we give up the hunt and eat a wordless meal surrounded by majestic, quiet beauty. —Kellie Evans

4 GREAT VEGAS PICNIC IDEAS ① En route to Lake Mead (nps.gov/lake/index.htm) or Red Rock Canyon (redrockcanyonlv.org), pick up a selection of cheeses, charcuterie, and other haute snacks at Artisanal Foods (artisanalfoods.com), owned by Brett Ottolenghi, who sources for Vegas's top restaurants. ② Nosh on crusty Bon Breads (bonbreads.com) and Nevada-grown produce from Bet on the Farm (betonthefarm.com), Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich's Thursday farmers' market, while strolling through the Gardens at the Springs Preserve (springspreserve.org), a desert botanical garden just north of the Strip. ③ Grab a belly filler—housemade Italian sausage, capicola, and mozzarella; Buffalo, New York-style beef on weck—from local favorite Naked City Sandwich Shop (nakedcitylv.com) before an outing to the petroglyphs at Valley of Fire State Park (parks.nv.gov/vf.htm). ④ Drive 7,717 feet up into the Spring Mountains, a half hour west of the Strip, and get a burger to go from Mount Charleston Lodge (mtcharlestonlodge.com) for a picnic amid the Ponderosa pines.







A TABLE SET FOR HIGH ROLLERS



HIDDEN AWAY IN the MGM Grand, far from the blinking and bleeping of the slot machines on the main casino floor, there is a hushed garden under a high glass dome where it's always between 73 and 75 degrees and the adjoining architecture was copied detail for detail from an 18th-century Tuscan villa. This is the Mansion, and guests are admitted by invitation only. A majority are Asian—most of them Chinese visiting from the mainland, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, or British Columbia—and their game is usually high-stakes baccarat. A player retiring from the tables at 1:00 A.M. might spontaneously request a ten-course dinner for himself and a dozen friends. No problem. The menu might run to lobster stir-fried with chili sauce and scattered with slivers of lemongrass. Fried chicken wings glazed with a sauce of dried red chile and miso. Strips of seared filet mignon and king mushroom, garnished with leaves of fried basil and a cherry tomato flash-fried and deftly peeled to resemble a blossom. Executive chef Pui Wing Hui, a veteran of a number of celebrated kitchens, came to the Mansion from Hong Kong in 1999. "Each guest has their own unique taste," he says. "Some prefer traditional dishes; others are looking for new creations." The game they're here to play, in which one might wager upward of \$100,000 in a single hand, is never far from their minds. Auspicious foods—chicken, for good luck; fish, an emblem of plenty—are welcome. An ingredient like bitter melon, whose Mandarin name can also be interpreted as "not happy," will appear on the menu called something else. And should a guest crave a classic *coq au vin* or something more nouvelle, co-executive chef Christian Rassinoux and his team, in charge of the Continental-style menu, are always on hand to ensure that the good times never, ever stop rolling. —Beth Kracklauer

Chile-miso chicken wings (see page 76 for a recipe). Facing page: a meal at the Mansion, featuring (clockwise from top left) chile-miso chicken wings, bamboo mushroom stuffed with bird's nest, assorted dim sum, shrimp shumai, filet mignon, coral cod filets, and (center of table) stir-fried lobster.

Love, Loss, Oysters, and a Good Filet

REGRETS, I've had a few. Oh, have I. Truly. Then again, as I swim deeper into middle age, the regrets and failures and all-out life belly flops take on new layers of prismatic light, at least in memory.

My first and only marriage ended in Las Vegas several years ago. I had flown in from Los Angeles that morning like a suicide bomber to deliver horrible news: I had fallen in love with another man; our marriage was over. Mr. X—that's what my girlfriends called my husband, as he was so often on the road with various bands, they joked that he might be fictional—was in the middle of a multiyear contract at Caesars Palace. A funny, salt-of-the-earth Midwesterner, Mr. X was so beloved that upon hearing news of my betrayal, his boss, Bette Midler, reportedly cried.

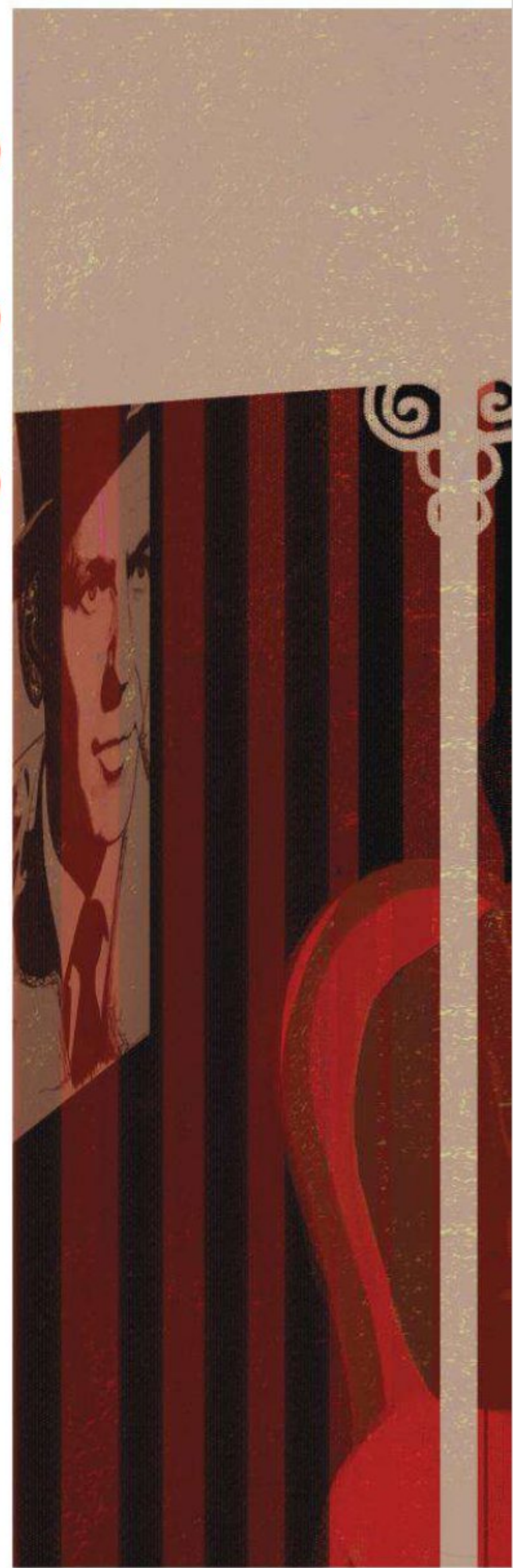
And if the image of Bette Midler crying doesn't make you feel like the worst person in the world, I don't know what will.

As our two girls romped with the babysitter through the basement "fun dungeon" of the Excalibur Hotel, Mr. X and I stayed in his coldly marbled apartment at the Platinum on Flamingo Road and talked and wept. Our Las Vegas was as hallucinogenic, if not remotely as recreational, as the one in Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: the intensity and range of emotion, two decades of life together abruptly telescoped down, the oxygen draining slowly but surely from the air. We sat shivah and mourned our 20-year relationship, picking up each happy memory—the first baby, bathing the children, our last Christmas—and witnessing its gradual turn into ash.

Here's the twist, though. I'm not going to argue that this next moment mitigated the pain. It in no way made it all okay. But I will tell you that after 36 straight hours of the most profound nausea, self-loathing, and despair, it wasn't that Mr. X and I were hungry, exactly; it was just that we were utterly wrung out and, for the moment, done. And, as the desert sky went from pink to blue, and the Luxor pyramid laser began its nightly pulse, it occurred to us that we were, after all, conveniently near the Strip. Which is to say, with a sudden impulse of gallows cheer, we decided to take a break from weeping and utilize our babysitting hours instead for a last supper, which we agreed without question (as we almost always did about food) must be at an expensive steak house.

Even as I think back on it

today, that choice still strikes me as both logical and classic. After all, the salad years of a relationship—the dating, the drinking, the late-night whims—are all about silly food, are they not? It's tapas, foofy small plates, the trendy sushi joint of the moment. By contrast, consider the formal last dinner of a long-term marriage. The execution orders have been filed in tripli-





cate; there is nothing to be done then but to sit down to one last meal. Just as death-row inmates' final choices tend toward basic foods—fried chicken, mashed potatoes with gravy, two fried eggs and two sausages—the last meal of a marriage should also be simple. And yet it does still qualify as a date of sorts, so why not go out in style?

For such a meal, you can't do

better than a top-drawer Las Vegas steak house, and here's why. To begin with, this is a town where even upscale restaurants aren't shy about pumping out a constant sound track of Frank Sinatra—the guy, after all, who loved and lost, lost and loved, then loved and lost again, which in life's most heinous moments can be somehow comforting.

Next, I'm not going to say (although I've heard it said) that it's because it's a Mafia town, but Las Vegas has excellent service. Forget New York or Los Angeles. Please—no one moves to Vegas to become an actor and then ends up sullenly waiting tables. There's real respect among this city's restaurant professionals for the art of service, the Strip being the glamorous big show one

works one's way up to, proudly. They make you feel like royalty.

We could have marked the end of our marriage at Morton's, where they preface the meal by wheeling out big slabs of meat, practically on gurneys. But we did it instead at Delmonico Steakhouse, an Emeril restaurant with a subtle Creole flair. We had a dozen oysters (our marriage's last); iceberg wedges (our divorce's chilly future); fabulous, slightly bloody filets (reminiscent of crucifixion, perhaps) with tons of Béarnaise (because who needs to keep in shape now?); all finished off with Key lime pie (fittingly, the dessert Nora Ephron's protagonist throws in the face of a philandering spouse at the end of the movie *Heartburn*).

Like many successful professional musicians, Mr. X had long since given up drugs and drinking. Knowing myself and my evil ways, I probably tried to inveigle him into sharing one last good bottle of red wine, although I honestly can't say for sure that he did. I certainly drank, though, and it felt to me that, even though I am an overtalkative neurotic given to streams of consciousness that sometimes even those closest to me cannot follow, while Mr. X is a deeply soulful man who likes fishing, nature's quiet, and Miles Davis, for one last meal we enjoyed each other's company. Which is to say, tomorrow would bring the unknowable, yes, but tonight, for three hours, we floated in a circle of warm light, where, unlike marriage, what unfolded was a civilized dance made up of well-understood acts of pleasure and elegance, with gleaming silverware and pressed linens, abetted by a surpassingly well-trained waitstaff who actually knew what they were doing. —Sandra Tsing Loh, author of *Mother on Fire* (Three Rivers Press, 2008) and contributing editor to the Atlantic

WHERE THE FISH ARE ALWAYS BITING

THERE IS SOMETHING jarring and miraculous about eating the best seafood in the world in the middle of the desert. The first time I dined at Bartolotta, which Milwaukee-born chef Paul Bartolotta opened in the Wynn Hotel in 2005, I couldn't believe the fish on offer: sweet blue lobsters from Sicily; Tyrrhenian sea bream; meaty scorpion fish from Puglia. Even in Italy, the inspiration for this seafood-centric restaurant, you'd be hard-pressed to find these regional specialties an hour's

drive from where they were brought to shore; these are the gems locals keep for themselves. But Bartolotta has rewritten the rules when it comes to sourcing fish. He's made friends and struck deals with buyers at markets across the Mediterranean, and they overnight him tons—literally, tons—of just-caught seafood four times a week. Nothing is frozen; many crustaceans are kept alive in saltwater tanks until an order comes in. And though the variety and quality are exemplary

of Vegas-style lavishness, what really impresses me is the way the chef honors his ingredients. There are no sauce swirls or complicated constructions. The cooking is elemental so as not to obscure the flavor and texture of the fish: a *fritto misto* encasing juicy specimens in an ethereal, crisp batter; a pasta flavored with not much more than langoustines, tomatoes, and olive oil. "This is how they eat seafood in Italy," the chef says. And in Vegas, it's how they eat it now, too. —Dana Bowen





Chef Paul Bartolotta prepares *spaghetti agli scampi*, a pasta dish made with sweet crustaceans from the Mediterranean Sea. (See page 77 for a recipe.)



Craving, Satisfied

I like my *huarache* topped with steak—a thin slice of beef on a thick, oval corn tortilla smothered in refried pinto beans, red and green salsas, and crumbled *cotija* cheese. At Los Antojos (“The Cravings”), a little restaurant in a strip mall on South Eastern Avenue, the Martinez family sells some of the tastiest *huaraches* around—a public service in a town whose Mexican population has grown by leaps and bounds in the past 20 years, yet has never had many Mexican restaurants to show for it. The soul of the operation is 75-year-old Carmen Ruiz. “We don’t mess with her kitchen,” says her son Francisco Martinez. Every entrée is made from scratch, from the *huaraches* and Mexico City–style quesadillas and gorditas to the popular “consome loco,” a rich chicken soup loaded with rice, vegetables, and shredded chicken. The ingredients come from La Bonita, a nearby market that’s another hub for the Vegas Latino community. “My mother has a club of fans over there,” Martinez says. “It’s like shopping with a star.”

—Abby Tegnella, editor-in-chief of Vegas Magazine

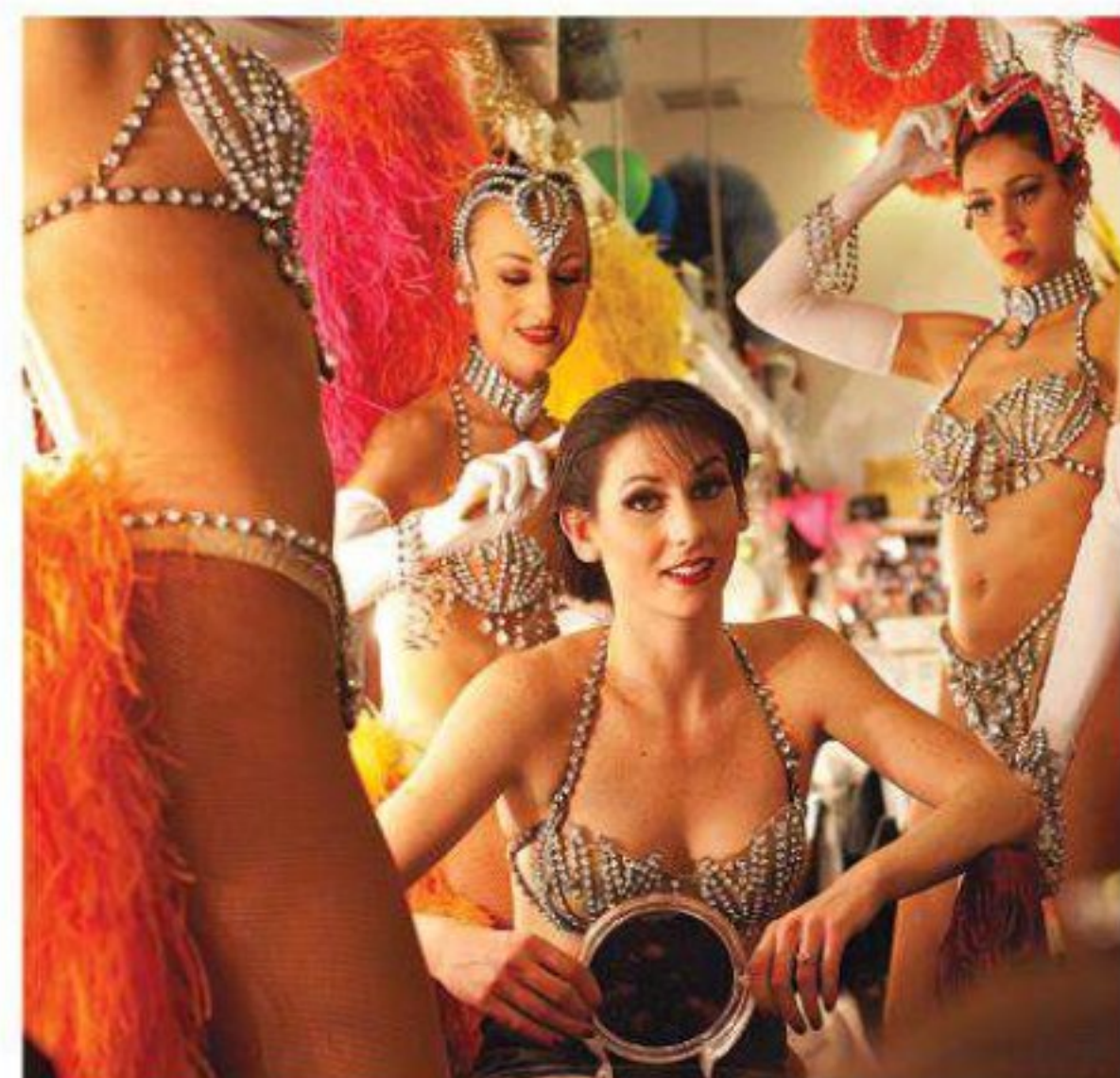
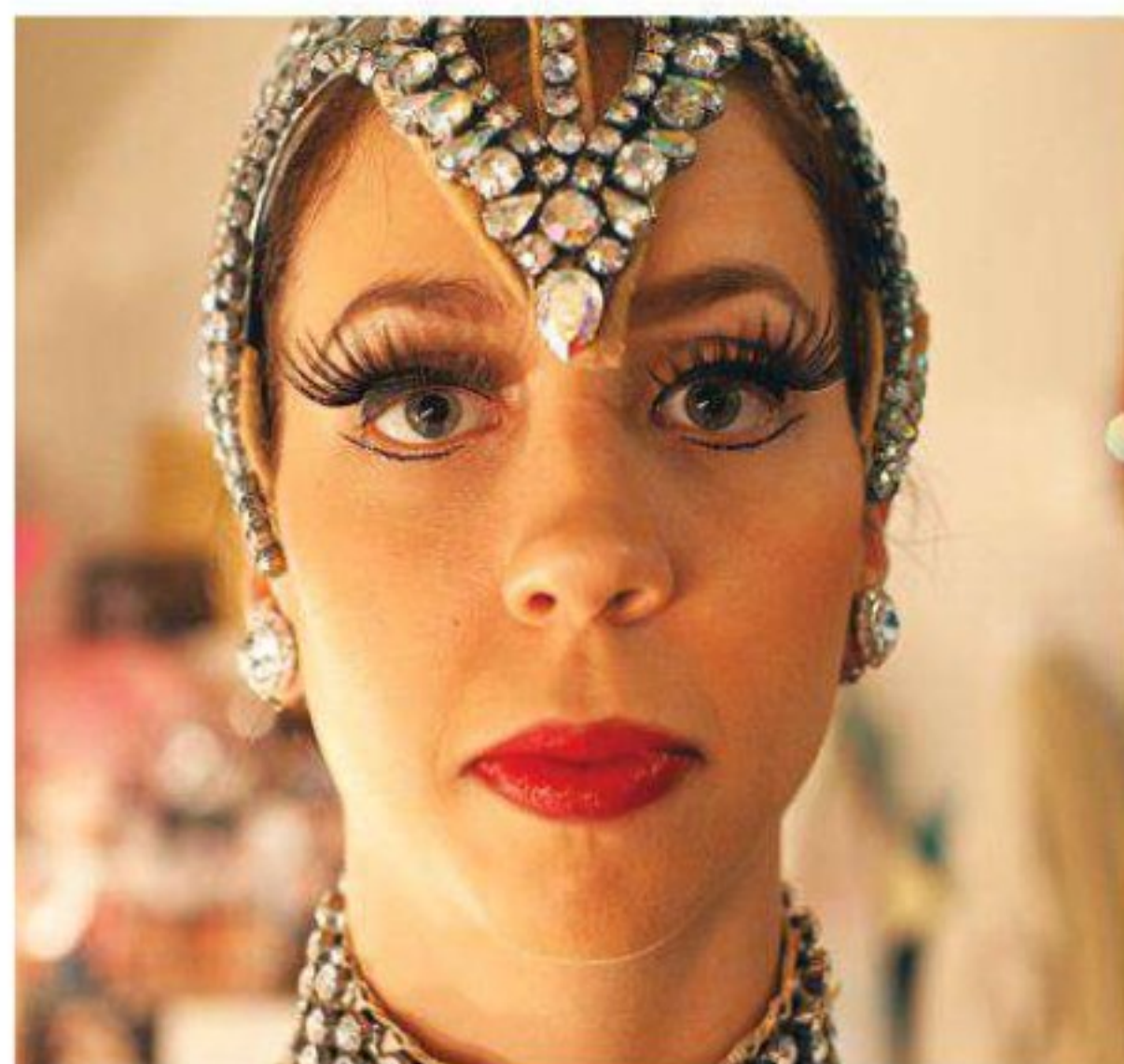
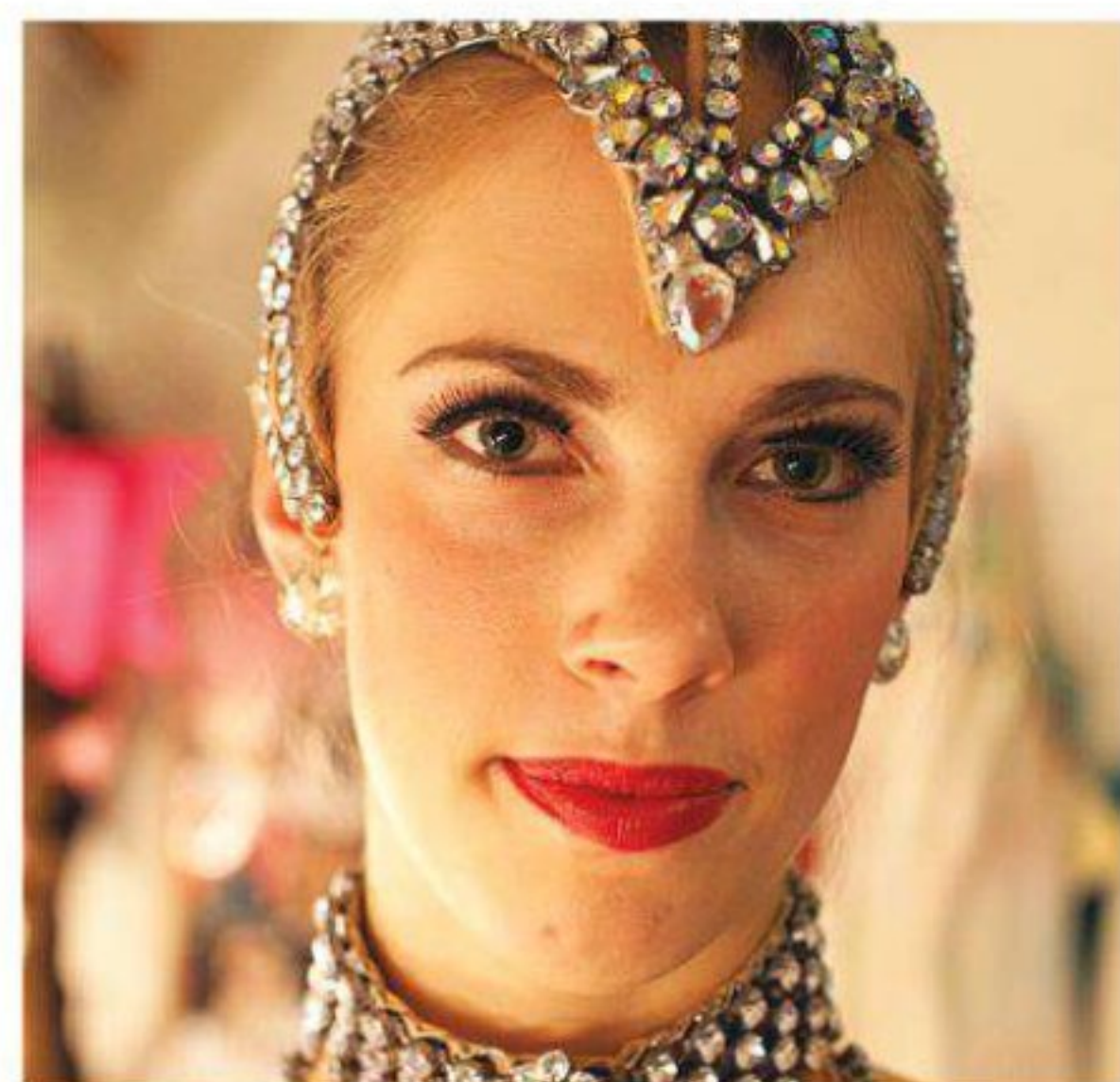
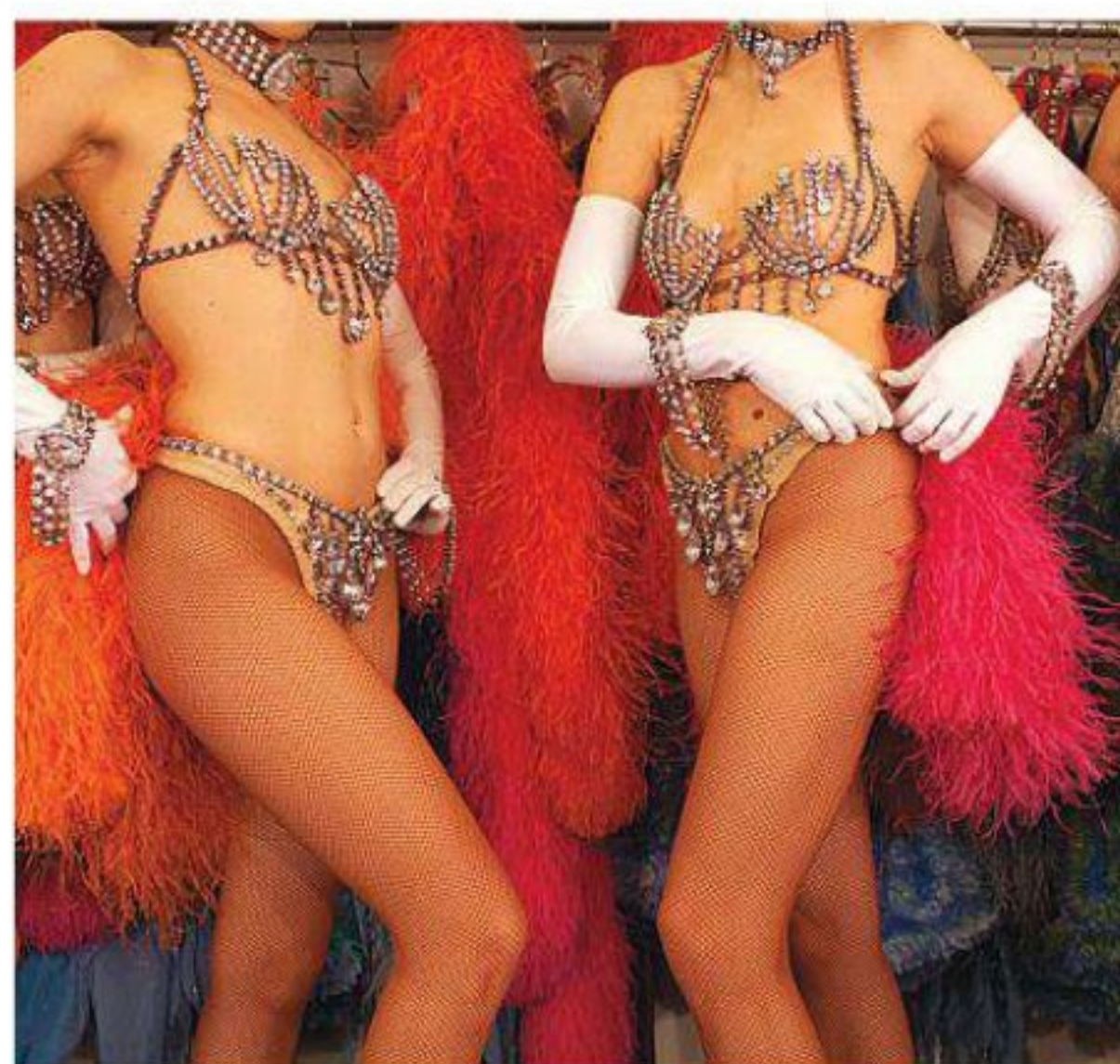
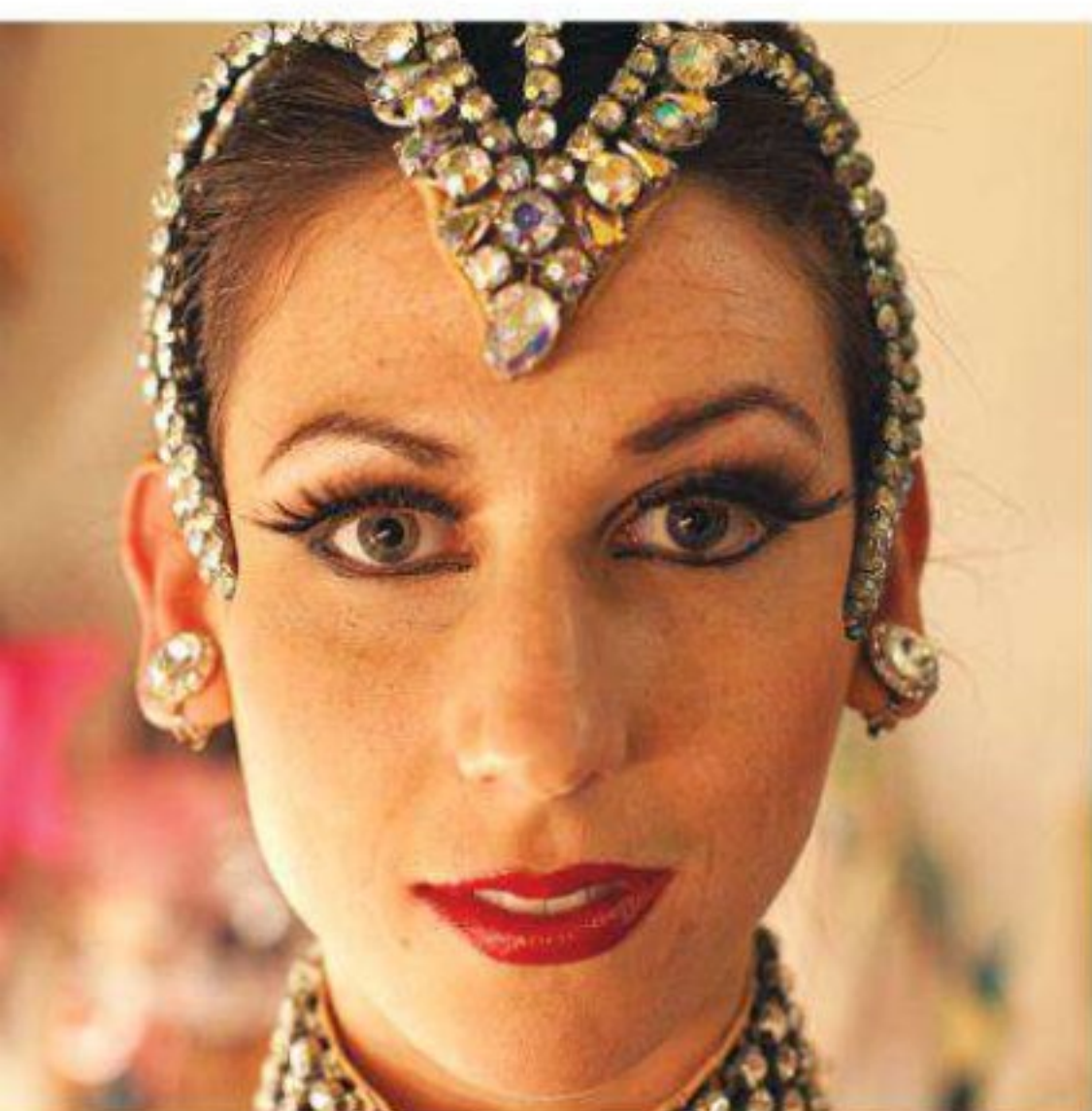




It's Pleasure Central All Day Long

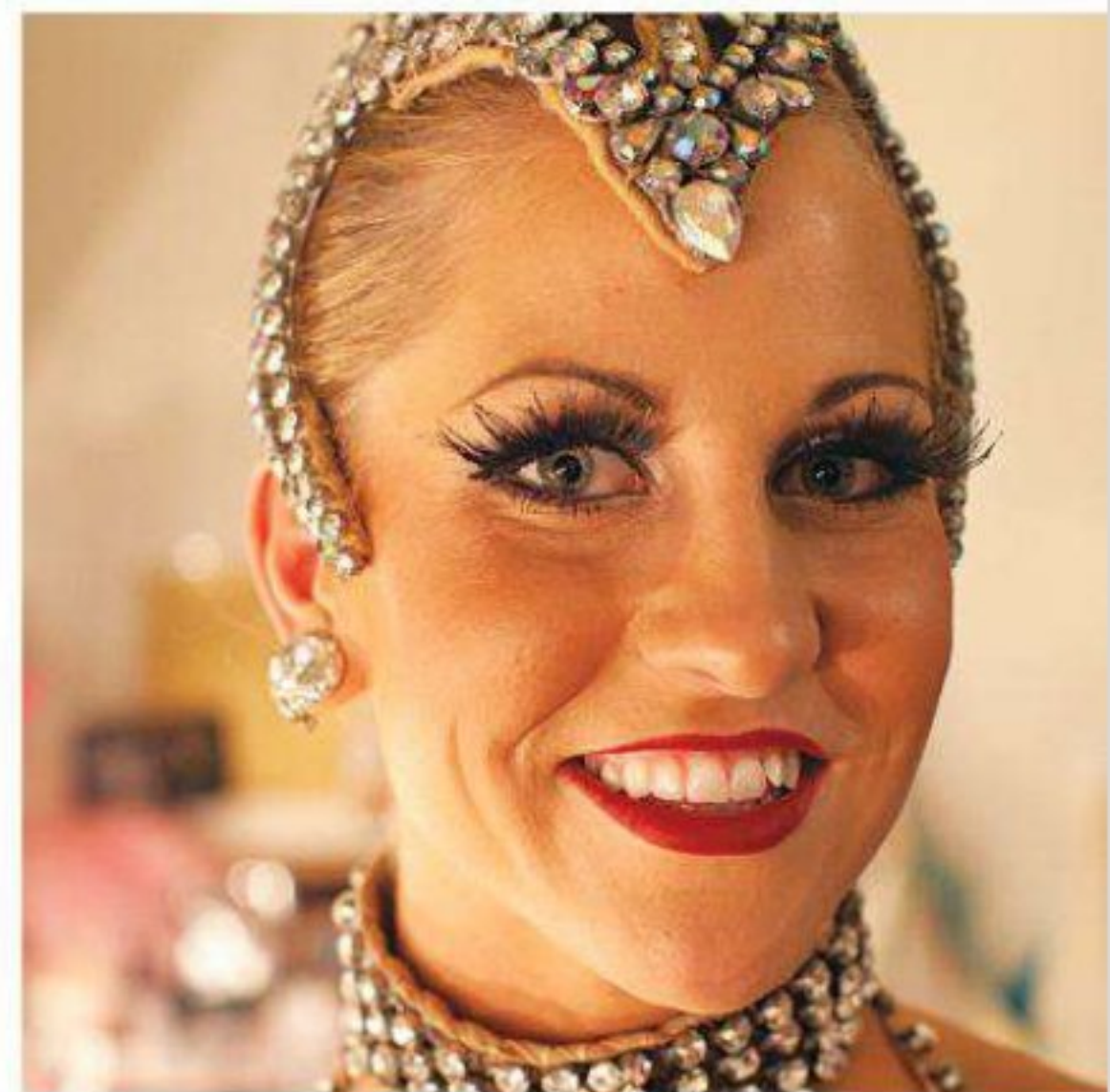
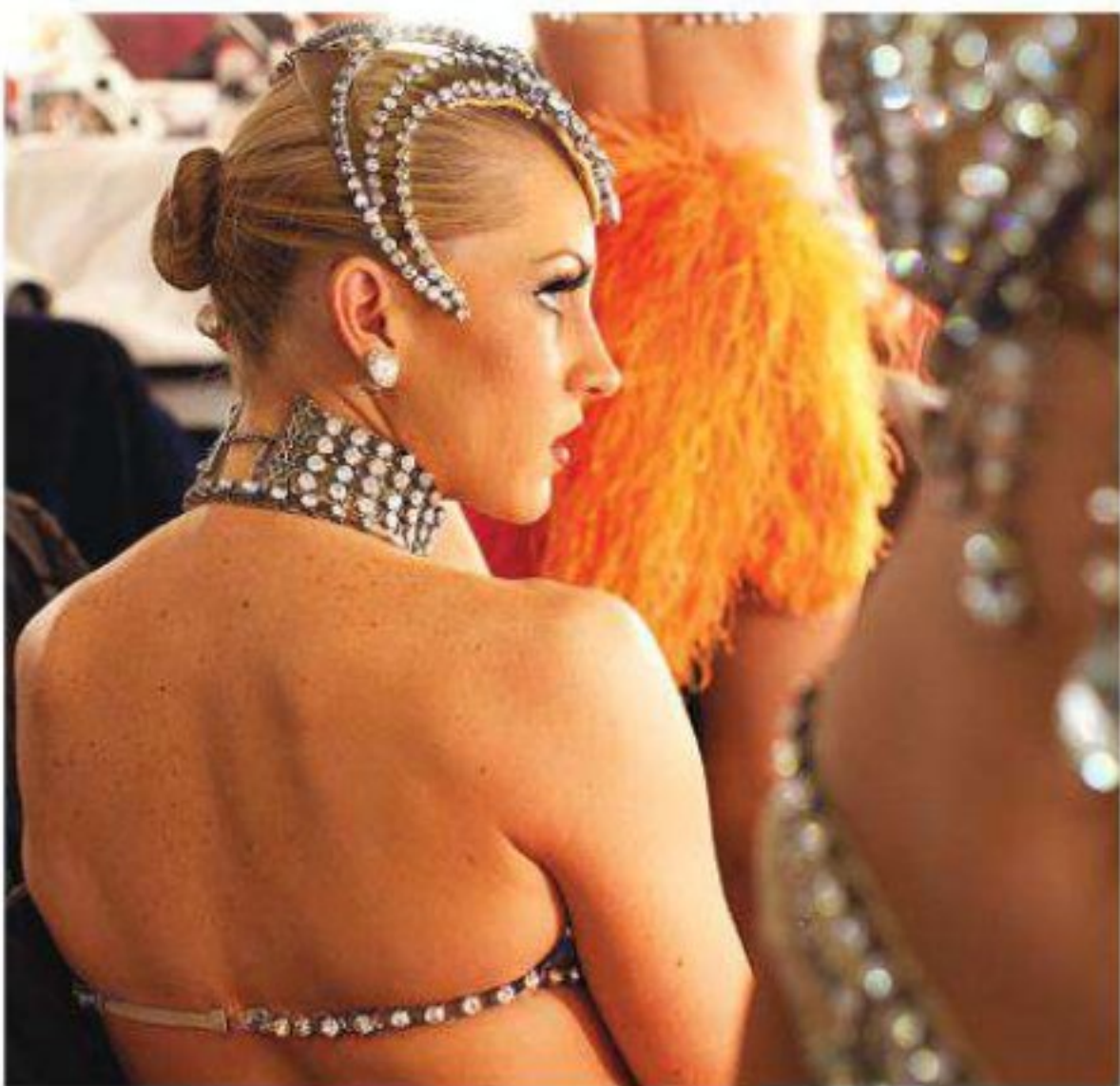
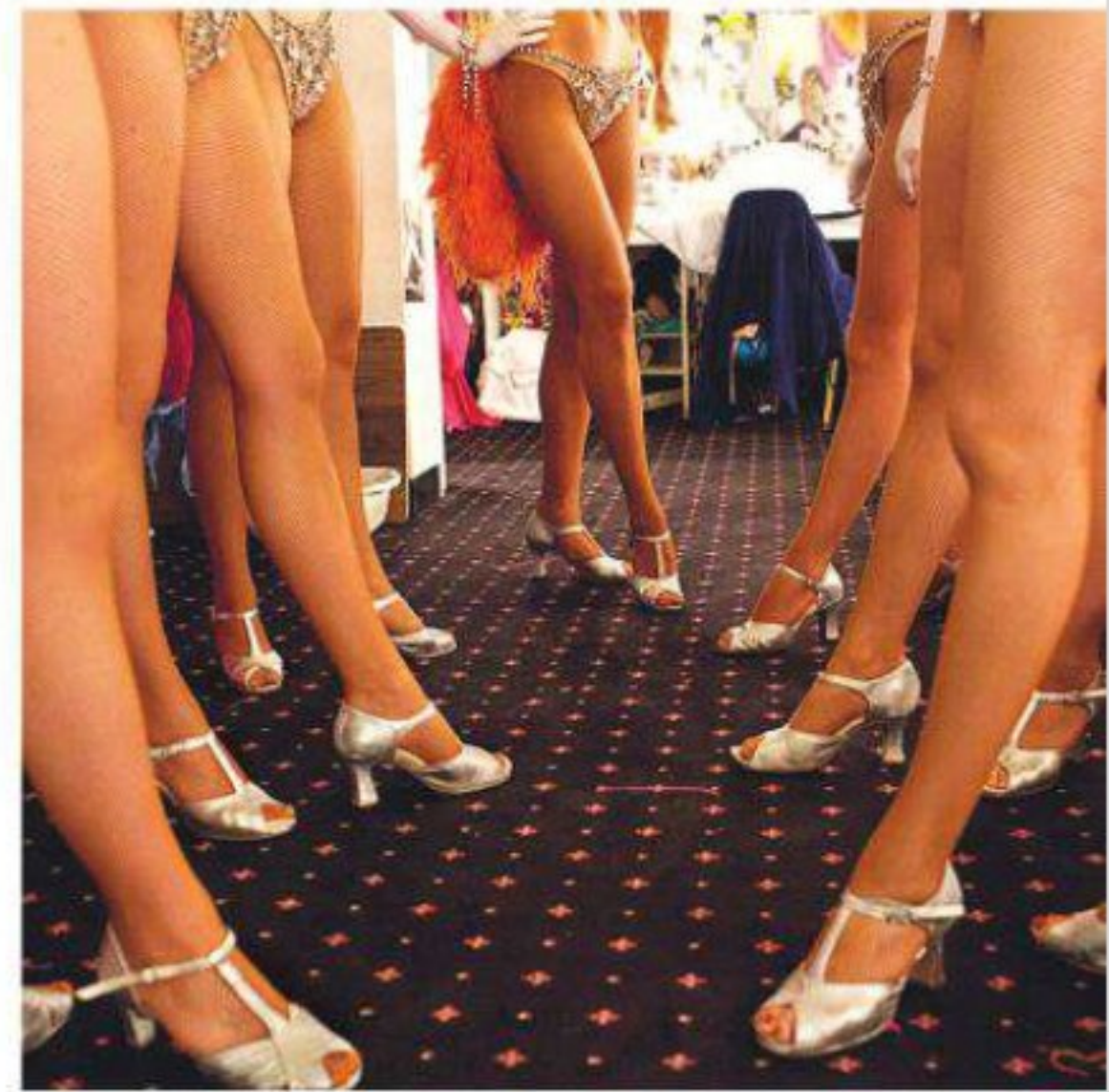
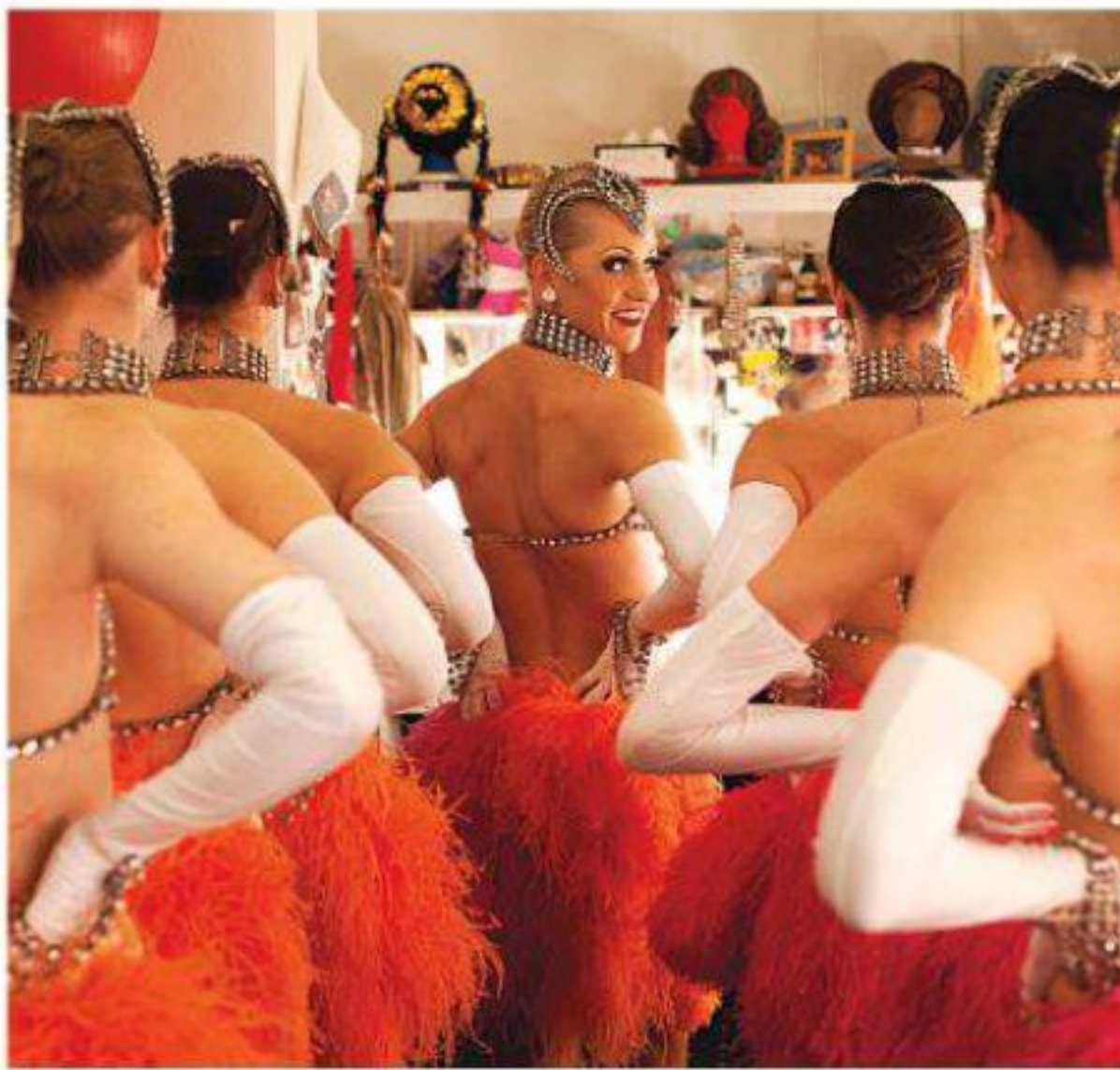
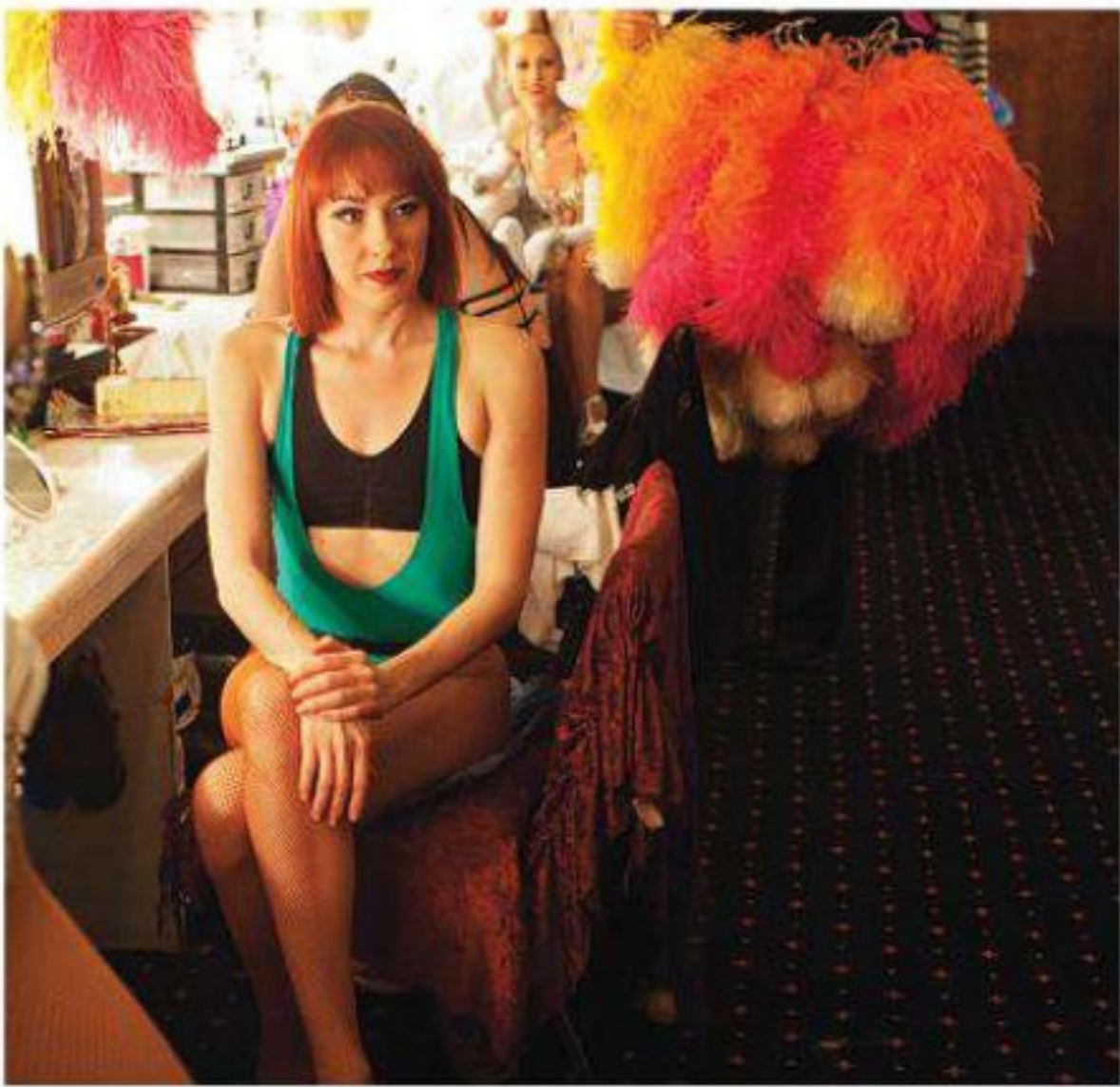
LAS VEGAS HAS ALWAYS been a 24-hour town—but not for foodies. After an evening show or an all-night spin at the tables, people craving a quality meal generally went hungry. Then, last fall, Michel Richard—a French chef with a reputation for crowd-pleasing elegance—brought a branch of his D.C. restaurant Central Michel Richard to Caesars Palace. It's open 'round the clock. "People told me, 'You're crazy,'" Richard says. "But I got on the plane anyway." The result: an army of 170 employees serving everything from fried chicken and doughnut holes to juicy steaks, deviled eggs topped with white anchovies (pictured, left), and sumptuous desserts to 1,500 people every day. It's a mind-boggling production. Each burger, for instance, is topped with two delicate potato *tuiles* that take 18 hours to make. To whip up a batch of 2,000—two days' worth of *tuiles*—100 pounds of potatoes are peeled, shredded, rinsed, strained, sautéed, mixed with ingredients including gelatin, piped into ten-pound tubes, and frozen for ten to 12 hours. The potato concoction is then sliced, shaped, and baked by kitchen troops who are constantly being trained and retrained with military discipline. All of it is in the service of the elemental joys of eating. "What do you eat from eleven at night until five in the morning?" Richard says. "Nothing! You're usually sleeping! But in Las Vegas, people like their steaks, roasted chicken, and french fries." Thanks to Richard, they can have exemplary versions of these comfort foods at any hour of the day. —A.T.

Deviled eggs topped with white anchovies and rice-cracker caviar is served at Central Michel Richard, the chef's 24-hour restaurant in Caesars Palace. (See page 76 for a recipe.)



Just Fabulous

The feathered headdresses, the perfect line of perfect legs in fishnet stockings: *Jubilee!* at Bally's is the show that delivers classic Vegas spectacle, undiluted. Most nights, the spangled bikini tops are whisked off (like I said, the show delivers), but for one family-friendly performance per week, the tops stay on. Each of these dancers has trained from a very young age to get to this venue; each of those headdresses, dripping with Swarovski crystals, weighs as much as a small chandelier. It's hard work. But you'd never know it. —B.K.



ALL HAIL THE KING AND QUEEN OF COOKBOOKS

THE LAST THING I expected to find in Las Vegas was a phrase of apples. Well, actually, the last thing I expected to find in Las Vegas was a store that had a book that had a recipe for a phrase of apples, a medieval English dessert that resembles a fruit pancake. In fact, I almost didn't.

Amber Unicorn Books is just another shabby-looking storefront in one of the shopping malls that parade endlessly through non-Strip Vegas. Sitting in the shadow of a Trader Joe's, it makes no attempt to lure you through the door.

Even inside, the shop is slow to reveal itself. I'd been told they had some vintage cookbooks, but walking through aisles of military books and science fiction, I was sure I'd stumbled into the wrong place. Then I noticed a first edition of *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book* and pounced. Next, I spied another rare cookbook, *Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes* (complete with transcripts from a program that was on the air from 1926 to 1934). But it was not until I picked up a signed copy of Louis Szathmary's *American Gastronomy* that I felt a little tap on my shoulder. I turned to find a pleasant-looking woman sur-

veying me. "Did you ever meet him?" she asked, referring to the chef and author of the book I was holding. "He was a truly great man; a regular customer of ours."

Myrna Donato owns the shop with her husband, Lou, and she doesn't want you to just buy her cookbooks. She wants you to treasure them. She wants you to discuss them with her. She wants to tell you about the people who buy them and the meals that they make from them. Last year, when I found myself spending a few weeks in Las Vegas, Amber Unicorn became my lifeline to reality. Whenever the glitz of the Strip became too much, I fled to the bookshop, losing myself in reading and recipes. I spent a lot of money at Amber Unicorn, but I was getting much more than old cookbooks. For me, this modest little shop with its superb cookbook collection was the perfect antidote to neon Vegas. And unlike everything in that other Vegas, this one comes home; the shop ships. —*Ruth Reichl, author of Tender at the Bone (Random House, 1997)*

9 GREAT BOOKS ON THE SHELVES AT AMBER UNICORN

Book of Good Dinners For My Friend by Fannie Merritt Farmer (Dodge, 1914)

Cross Creek Cookery by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (Scribner, 1942)

Bottoms Up by Ted Saucier (Greystone Hawthorne, 1962)

A Treasury of Great Recipes by Mary and Vincent Price (Ampersand, 1965)

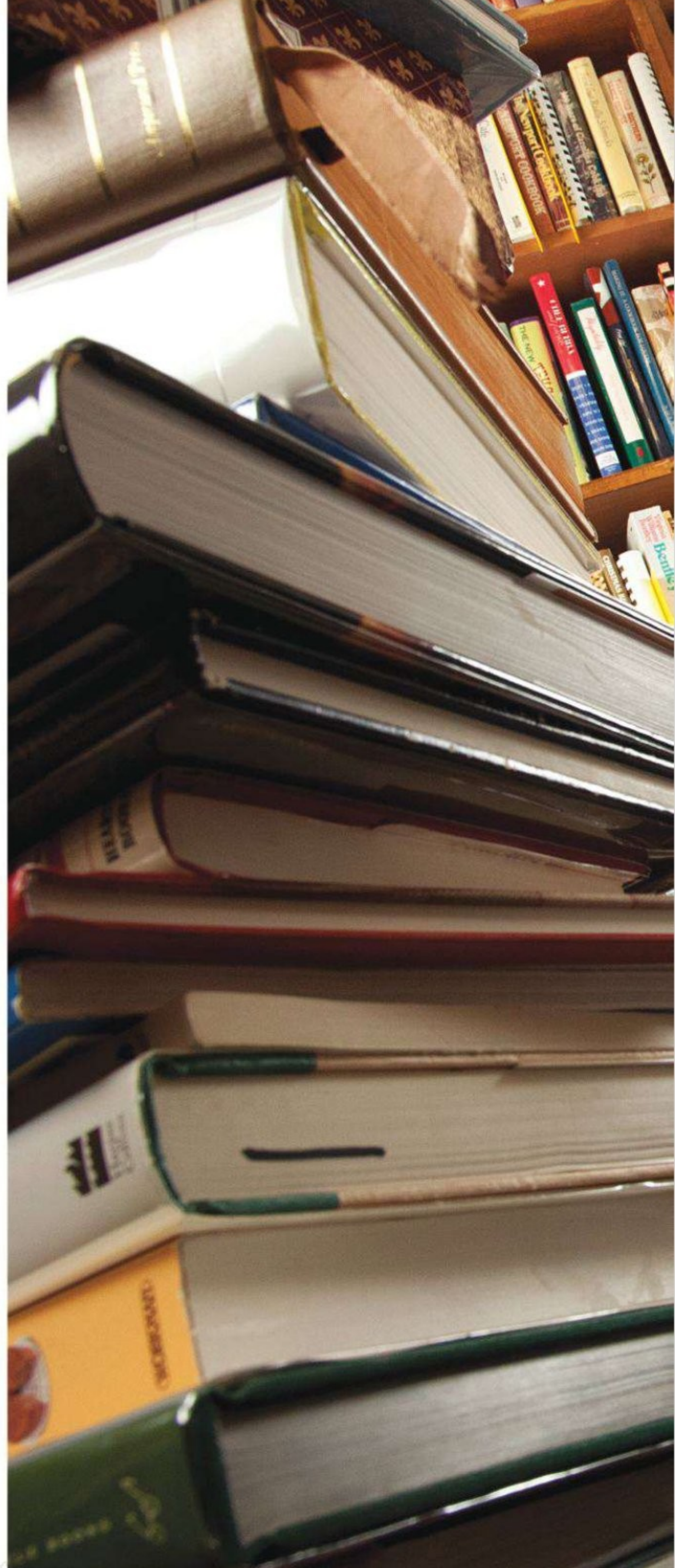
Les Dinners de Gala by Salvador Dali (Felice, 1973)

Pearl's Kitchen by Pearl Bailey (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973)

Dumas on Food by Alexandre Dumas (Folio Society, 1978)

The Old World Kitchen by Elisabeth Luard (Bantam, 1987)

A Taste of Murder: Diabolically Delicious Recipes from Contemporary Mystery Writers edited by Jo Grossman and Robert Weibezahl (Poison Pen Press, 1999)





Myrna and Lou Donato in their bookshop, Amber Unicorn.

Dining Like a Rhinestone Cowboy

NEARLY two decades ago, when I was a restaurant critic at the *Los Angeles Times*, I visited Las Vegas intent on eating a juicy steak at Binion's Horseshoe. The meat was raised on owner Jack Binion's ranch in Miles City, Montana. I made the mistake of entering Binion's with a card-counting friend who'd been banned from the casino for life. Spotted by a pit boss, we ended up running for our lives down a side street, with two goons in hot pursuit.

Fact is, beneath its neon veneer, Las Vegas remains the Old West. Most everyone who travels here,

whether from Scranton or Singapore, wants to experience a legendary Vegas steak house, and it's been that way for as long as anyone can remember.

Mobster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel founded upscale Vegas in 1946 when he opened its first fancy "carpet joint," the Flamingo Hotel & Casino, but a restaurant scene didn't take shape until the 1950s, when gourmet dining rooms helmed by tuxedoed captains became the ne plus ultra. In the early '60s, my friend Larry Ruvo worked as a busboy at House of Lords in the Sahara, where everyone ordered the steak

Diane, seared at the table with Worcestershire sauce and brandy in a copper pan. "Those were the days," Larry says. "At Chateau Vegas, the owner, Al Mangarelli, bought his meat directly from a Chicago stockyard. He'd bring Sambuca or Strega to your table. If you were a regular, he'd leave the bottle." (Today Larry runs Southern Wine & Spirits of Nevada, which sells top-drawer Bordeaux to every steak house in town.)

Business, official and otherwise, has always been conducted in the tufted-leather booths of the city's steak houses. Back in the 1970s, Las Vegas's former mayor, Oscar B. Goodman, was an attorney to a number of notorious clients; he held meetings with a knife and fork. "I loved Vegas in the '70s," he told me recently, hoisting a gin martini. Today his wife, Carolyn, is the city's mayor, and Goodman holds court at Oscar's, a steak house named for him at the Plaza Hotel downtown. We talked in his office behind the bar, as I dug into a flank steak marinated

6 TERRIFIC STEAK HOUSES

❶ **Carnevino** (The Palazzo; 3325 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/789-4141) serves super-aged beef and lusty Italian fare, Batali-style.

❷ **Cut** (The Palazzo; 3325 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/607-6300) is Wolfgang Puck's wordly riff on the genre (Kobe sashimi, lamb chops with cucumber-mint raita).

❸ **Delmonico Steakhouse** (The Venetian; 3355 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/414-3737) is carnivore Creole (gumbo, châteaubriand carved tableside) à la Emeril.

❹ **Jean Georges Steakhouse** (Aria Resort & Casino; 3730 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 866/359-7757) does designer-label beef with sauces both classic (Béarnaise) and creative (soy-miso butter).

❺ **Prime Steakhouse** (Bellagio; 3600 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/693-7111), chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's first Vegas steak house, is still one of the city's best.

❻ **The Steak House** (Circus Circus; 2880 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/734-0410) is a clubby retreat deep inside the delirium of Circus Circus, with beef aged on site—an unbeatable value.





Porterhouse with lemon-thyme butter (see page 76 for a recipe).

with onions, garlic, and peppers. “That was Tony ‘The Ant’ Spilotro’s favorite,” he said. Spilotro, the basis for Joe Pesci’s character in the movie *Casino*, was Goodman’s most notorious client of all.

The steak chains of the ’80s—Ruth’s Chris, the Palm, Smith & Wollensky, Del Frisco—all traded on that old-school vibe. The modern steak house didn’t arrive until Charlie Palmer opened his eponymous place at the Four Seasons Hotel, and Jean-Georges Vongerichten launched Prime Steakhouse at the Bellagio. They were part of a wave of celebrity chefs that hit the city in the late ’90s and just kept coming. By the time I moved to Vegas, in 1999, it was becoming a world-class dining destination. “Customers today are super discerning,” Palmer says. “They care about everything from the beef’s heritage to the aging program.”

In 2012, a 35-day dry-aged steak seems almost prosaic. A porterhouse I recently ordered at Mario Batali’s and Joe Bastianich’s steak palace Carnevino, in the Palazzo, had been aged 260 days and tasted of rich meat and blue cheese; executive chef Zach Allen insisted that it be eaten rare, cut thin like an Italian *tagliata*, dressed with sea salt. But for my money, the city’s best steak now is the designer-labeled Rangers Valley Angus wet- and dry-aged New York strip at Jean Georges Steakhouse, in the glittering CityCenter’s Aria Resort & Casino. The grain-fed meat, cooked on a wood-burning grill, is intensely beefy with a firm yet yielding texture, and a finish as long as a premium Pomerol.

Meanwhile, the steak house at Binion’s is still open, as are such shrines to old Vegas as the Golden Steer and Bob Taylor’s Ranch House. Even in a town whose shape is constantly shifting, as one building implodes and another rises in the image of our latest heart’s desire, we still love to play the cowboy. —Max Jacobson, contributing editor at Vegas Seven and co-author of *Eating Las Vegas* 2012 (Huntington Press).

TODD COLEMAN



A seafood tower, including Alaskan king crab legs, scallop ceviche, oysters, and lobster

Porterhouse steak with roasted tomatoes, asparagus, and truffled mashed potatoes

Crab two ways: roasted Alaskan crab in a scampi sauce and Dungeness crab salad



IF YOU'RE GOING TO DREAM, DREAM BIG

Beef tenderloin with
caramelized onions

Seared sea bass with tomato-
fennel stew

WHEN I FIRST MET Elaine Wynn, I was a 21-year-old fresh off the plane from Baltimore, one of the youngest servers at Osteria del Circo at the Bellagio. The restaurant was the first foray of the Maccioni family (of the legendary Manhattan restaurant Le Cirque) into Las Vegas and definitely my first experience in the world of serious dining. This was 1998. Sometimes I'd wait on Elaine and her husband, Steve Wynn, who'd just opened the Bellagio that year. They loved good food, and in bringing a dream team of celebrity chefs to the Bellagio, from Todd English to Jean-Georges Vongerichten, they were banking on the notion that upscale dining could become an attraction in itself in Las Vegas. Elaine noticed everyone. By 2004, I was part of her team for the opening of Wynn Las Vegas, where she was involved in virtually every detail, from the overall design concept to the housekeeping uniforms. Unlike previous Wynn properties, where erupting volcanoes or dancing fountains hailed passersby on the Strip, here the promise of dining as unforgettable as what you might experience in Paris, New York, or Hong Kong was the draw. When Wynn Las Vegas opened in 2005, it was with its own impressive roster of chefs, including Alex Stratta, Paul Bartolotta, and Takashi Yagihashi. The Wynns insisted that the chefs establish themselves as part of the community, not just parachute in a few times a year. They weren't building merely restaurants now, but a whole culture of fine dining. As for me, as young as I was when I was turned loose in Sin City, who knows what would have happened had I not fallen under Elaine's watchful eye? She has high expectations, and many of us who live and breathe restaurants in Vegas work hard to meet them. —Amy Rossetti, director of public relations at the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas


Elaine Wynn (center) with chef Steven Frain (left) and butler Alex Sang (right) in a suite at Encore at Wynn Las Vegas, with dishes from the room service menu.



Raising the Bar

It's a dry heat in Nevada, but Vegas is a wet town. Fifty years ago, when men were required to wear jackets in casinos, you might have ordered a Manhattan. You can today, too, though now the vermouth and bitters may well be house-made. Mixology hasn't always been top priority; when I moved here in 2001, I expected little more from my bartender than a bourbon and ginger, and a smile. Yet even then, there were signs the well-made cocktail had survived the years of yard-long daiquiris and liquor guns shooting cheap booze. Tony Abou-Ganim led the charge in 1998 by using only fresh ingredients at the Bellagio. Since then, the U.S. Bartenders' Guild, headquartered here, has helped keep standards high, on and off the Strip. Tonight, I'm writing from Herbs & Rye, west of the Boulevard, where I'll have a daiquiri, but only as Hemingway would—not a slushy machine in sight.

—*Xania Woodman, senior editor at Vegas Seven*



IT WAS THE THRILL of all the restaurants on the Strip that first drew me to Las Vegas, but it's the off-Strip places that keep me here. At least once a month, I head west to Chinatown to eat at one of my favorite places in the city: Honey Pig, a Korean barbecue joint. What do I order? Everything. Marinated beef short ribs, thick slabs of pork belly, octopus—you name it. It all gets put onto the round grill sizzling in the middle of the table, and we dive in with our chopsticks, picking out perfectly seared pieces of meat and wrapping them up in crisp green lettuce leaves with house-made kimchi and sliced jalapeño peppers and garlic, creating layer upon layer of flavor and texture. It's a chef's dream. Every time you take a handful, you can make it a little different: Spike this one up with bean paste, pile that one high with bean sprouts. It's simple, good, delicious comfort food, and after a day in chef's garb, I love how it's so hands-on, with everyone eating from the shared grill. Also (and I'm saying this as a man who knows from good fish), they do a breaded, baked mackerel here that really satisfies. It's not fancy—the fish was probably once frozen—but it is perfectly prepared, crunchy on the outside and flaky within, with a really clean, buttery flavor. My son, Christopher, who spent a year teaching English in Seoul, South Korea, loves this place as much as I do. He and I work together (he's the manager at my restaurant, RM Seafood), but while we see each other all day, Honey Pig is where we come to eat together, catch up, and enjoy each other's company—along with anyone else who wants to break bread after work with the boss. —Rick Moonen, chef-owner of RM Seafood in Las Vegas

A CHEF'S NIGHT OUT ON THE TOWN



Rick Moonen and friends dive into Korean barbecue at Honey Pig, a restaurant in Las Vegas's Chinatown.

PENNY DE LOS SANTOS



All You Can Eat

THE LAS VEGAS BUFFET is a gastronomic icon—no style of dining so perfectly captures the city's blend of optimism and indulgence. This has been the case ever since El Rancho Vegas, the first casino hotel, opened in 1941 and introduced a chuck wagon-style spread of meats and cheeses and other hearty snacks to keep late-night gamblers going. By the 1950s, every hotel had a buffet offering lots of food for not much money, and over the years the help-yourself genre became a canvas for culinary trends that reverberated across the country: sliced-to-order prime rib, towering piles of crab legs, make-your-own sundaes, omelette bars, pasta stations, the works. But if you ask me, the best thing to happen to the city's

most popular way of eating is Wicked Spoon in the Cosmopolitan Hotel, which opened just over a year ago and functions like no other buffet we know. It's not just the globe-trotting array of options: fried rice, crème brûlée, chicken potpie—whatever you're craving. It's that, unlike the upscale cafeteria model that most buffets ascribe to, nearly every dish is served in its own little vessel, whether it's shrimp and grits in mini frying pans, pad thai in tiny take-out boxes, or home-made *pappardelle* with wild mushrooms in cast-iron cocottes. Rather than heaped on a single platter, these servings are artfully conceived and perfectly proportioned, which is why I always leave super satisfied but never stuffed. —Dana Bowen **TOP ROW, FROM LEFT:** Stir-fried summer vegetables with tofu and red curry; tacos al pastor; General Tso's chicken; opera cake with chocolate mousse and cassis *macaron*; white cheddar macaroni and cheese (see page 77 for a recipe);



sake-soaked turkey with black pepper glaze; sweet chili-glazed prawns; cauliflower purée with roasted florets and clementine segments; chocolate-covered marshmallows; arugula with *burrata* cheese and cherry tomatoes. **SECOND ROW:** Biscuits with sausage gravy; heirloom tomato salad with micro basil and sherry vinaigrette; homemade chocolate with sea salt; summer succotash; *char sui* pork loin; fennel salad with grapefruit and orange segments; chocolate-covered strawberries; short-rib pizza with pickled onion and Gorgonzola cheese; homemade marshmallows; warm chocolate cake with dulce de leche. **THIRD ROW:** Ceviche with watermelon and green gazpachos; wild berry cobbler; tiramisù mousse, berry cheesecake, mango-passion fruit *macaron*, and mango and chocolate pots de crème; fried chicken; hash browns with cheddar cheese and caramelized onions; bone marrow with red onion marmalade and parsley-

onion salad; pecan-cinnamon French toast; Asiago-stuffed gnocchi with pesto and spring vegetables; grilled asparagus with hard-boiled egg, celery, red onion, and tarragon vinaigrette; honey-yogurt parfait. **FOURTH ROW:** Brussels sprouts with bacon and caramelized onions; berry bear claw and berry crossover; barbecue shrimp with cheese grits; dashi with rice noodles, peppers, and herbs; compressed melon and pineapple with orange-infused honey; sausage and olive pizza; spinach salad; chicken masala with braised kale; prime rib hash with sous-vide eggs; polenta with cremini mushrooms and Parmesan. **BOTTOM ROW:** Sautéed green beans with orange supremes; prime rib panini; clams with fennel and tomato; huevos rancheros; selection of salumi and cheese; watermelon with cucumber and cilantro; bourbon creamed corn; shrimp cocktail; sweet raisin roll and pear crossover with silver leaf; assorted sushi.





BACKSTAGE WITH VEGAS'S FAVORITE SHOWGIRL

THERE ARE SO MANY great restaurants to choose from in Vegas when I'm going out, but before doing *Peepshow*, the Vegas-style burlesque show I've been starring in for the past three years, I always eat in my dressing room at Planet Hollywood. I have to be careful about when I eat—that I eat early enough so it doesn't bother me when I'm onstage, but late enough that I don't get too hungry while I'm out there. Often, I order in Rao's: I love their lemon roast chicken and spaghetti marinara. Or I'll get the delicious tomato soup from the Earl of Sandwich. I'm usually not alone; my dressing room's not a private place. I leave my door open so the rest of the cast feels free to come on in. And my manager's usually back there with me while I eat, talking about future projects and things we should be working on. When I do get alone time, I think about the show, and how lucky I am to get the chance to dance onstage. I love being in *Peepshow*. There's so much energy that I feel when I'm out there dancing. That's what I look forward to when I'm eating before a show—all that Vegas energy. —*Holly Madison, star of Peepshow at Planet Hollywood*

Holly Madison tucks into a plate of Rao's spaghetti marinara (see page 77 for a recipe) backstage at *Peepshow* at Planet Hollywood.

LONDON NORDEMAN





BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS, VEGAS STYLE

MY FIRST TRIP TO Vegas brought me west with the promise of easy money and, more enticing still, a cache of secret spaghetti. The money, or so I flattered myself, was to be had at the gaming tables of the Rio Casino, where the World Series of Poker was held that year. I wasn't a great player, but poker is a game even a bad player can win if he finds one worse (or more intoxicated) than himself.

The spaghetti, though, was what prompted the trip. Thanks to my run as the editor of a New York City restaurant blog, I had access to the city's best tables. But there was one that was still forbidden to me: Rao's, the legendary East Harlem red-sauce joint famous for refusing reservations to anyone other than its favored clientele. Rao's is the special preserve of politicians, moguls, and mobsters, all of whom rank far higher in the real world than bloggers. It made perfect sense that I should be excluded. I would have excluded me. It made me sad, though, because I grew up in Atlantic City eating exactly the kind of old-school Italian-American food that Rao's was said to serve so peerlessly. Would I ever get to eat it? I would indeed; I would do so in Las Vegas.

I meant to salve the wound of my exclusion with a sensualistic surrogate. A Rao's had opened in Caesars Palace, and I was determined to feed on veal chops and shrimp fra diavolo purchased with my poker winnings. The restaurant was said to be an exact simulacrum of the original, down to the last signed photo of Frankie Valli.

Rao's hovered over my mind during the many hours I sat at the gaming tables. Patience and self-control kept me from playing weak cards or being drawn into risky bets. I simply waited until a near-unbeatable hand came my way, and hoped that one of the Gen-Y dopes in sunglasses and headphones, their hands atwitter with aggression and the rhythms of Nickelback, bet into me. The process was long and wearying, and part of the discipline was not to play tired or angry. So every five or six hours I would get up and find, to my delight, that I was hungry. And no matter the time of day or night, I would walk over to São Paulo Cafe, the Rio's coffee shop, and order double hash browns,

juice, and either bacon or sausage, depending on my mood. While I ate, I would look at a printout of the Rao's menu that I kept in my pocket.

Las Vegas is a city of spectacular coffee shops, from the off-Strip gem Mary's Hash House to the Tropical Breeze Café in the Flamingo hotel, where short-order cooking is an art form. The hash browns at the São Paulo deserve special notice. Like all fetishists, I pay inordinate attention to technique, and the versions I encountered there were flawless. Unlike the heavy ones forced on me in New York, these were loose white shreds, weightless and massless, seemingly more at home in superstring theory than on a griddle. They became evanescent vehicles for salt, frying oil, and their own textural metamorphosis. And, oh, what texture! Their surface was a perfect crust, ranging from Florentine gold in the middle to mahogany on the ragged edge. The tender inner shreds, only touched by heat, were nestled safely inside, all steam and innocence. I mixed up the crunchy edges with the soft middle and forked hungrily in, chasing each bite with orange juice. Then I was ready to play again.

Three days passed in this hypnotic routine. It was a welcome fugue state, the most relaxed I've ever been. I had only two things to do, and they were totally absorbing—play and eat. On the third day, I found myself at the table with people with things on their mind besides veal chops, and my concentration, aided by some timely queens and jacks, allowed me to win. I left for Rao's with \$1,200 in my pocket and an empty stomach.

What was the meal like? It was good, very good: I was wowed by the succulence of the veal, the vibrancy of the tomatoes. But I still want to go to the original Rao's. And looking back, the meals that stand out from the trip were the unplanned ones at the São Paulo Cafe, roughly 50 carpeted paces from the game floor. That was a true Las Vegas restaurant experience, as satisfying as Rao's and, in its way, as inimitable. —Josh Ozersky, author of the forthcoming *Colonel Sanders and the American Dream* (University of Texas Press)

Breakfast is served all day at Mary's Hash House, on Vegas's South Decatur Boulevard. The dishes here are: at top right, fried eggs with lamb hash; at center, blueberry pancakes; at bottom left, strawberry waffles; at bottom right, spinach-bacon omelet; on the platter, homemade jams, including cactus fruit, apple-jalapeño, and watermelon.

Hot, Sour, Sweet, Bitter, Hot

W

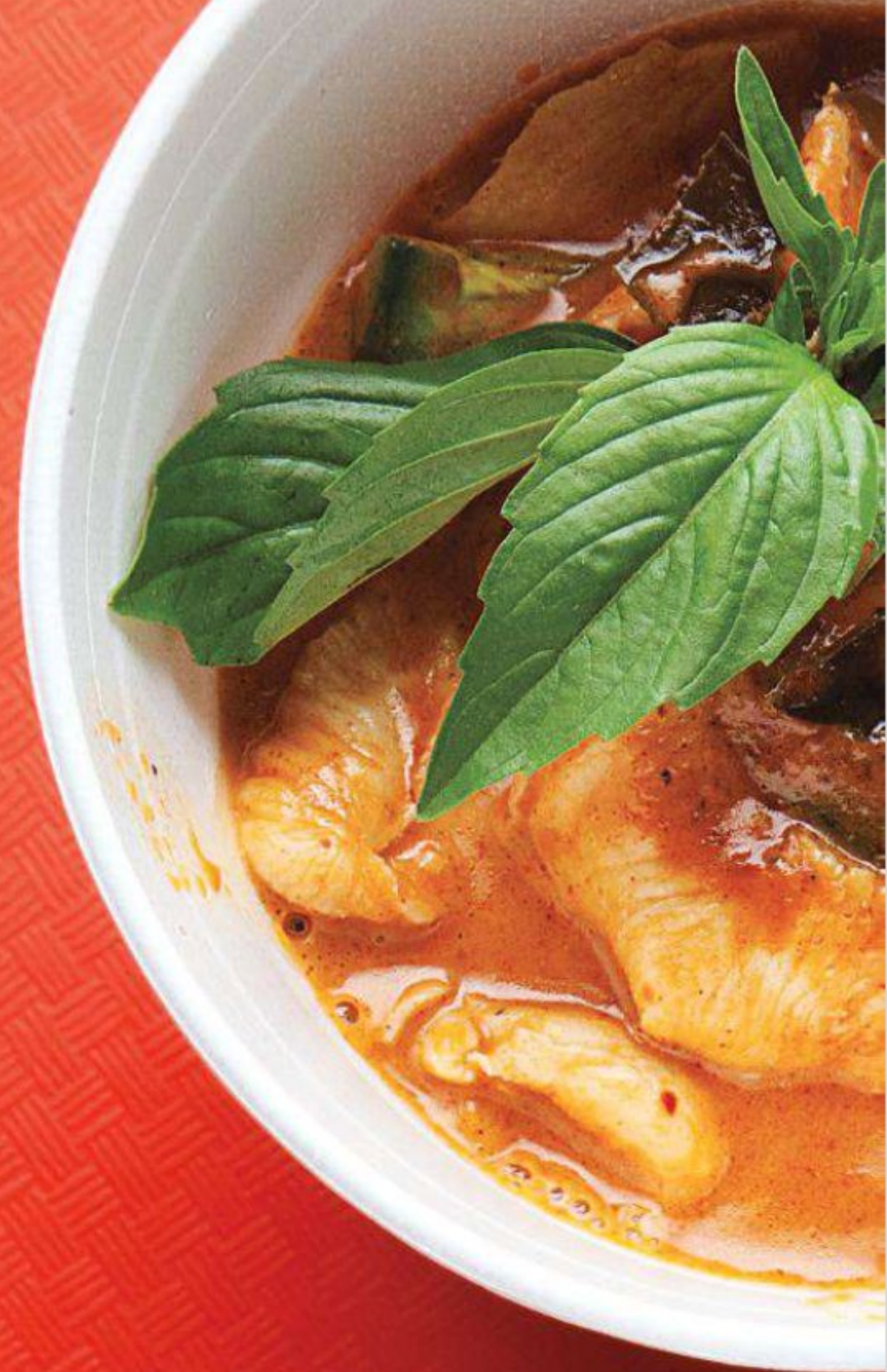
HEN I worked for *Gourmet* magazine a dozen years ago, one of my duties was to stop by Las Vegas every so often to report on the new hotel restaurants that were just starting to open in astonishing numbers. The confluence of Las Vegas and ambitious chefs seems obvious now, but it hadn't been more than a few years since the California Pizza Kitchen was the most interesting casino restaurant in town.

On one of these trips, I had been hitting bad restaurant after bad restaurant, all of them expensive, many of them classically French: *blanquette de veau* is hard to digest when it is 110 degrees in the shade. So on the third day, I canceled my reser-

vation at a dining room known for its individual beef Wellingtons and drove a mile or so off the Strip to a new Thai place jammed into an enormous strip mall where Led Zeppelin had once played in a skating rink.

Lotus of Siam was not immediately promising. The banner advertising a cheap lunch buffet was bigger than the restaurant's neon sign, the walls were decorated with torn travel agency posters, and most of the customers were piling their plates with broccoli beef and mounds of fried rice big enough to be mistaken for oyster middens. But when you opened the menu and

Panang curry two ways: with chicken (top; see page 77 for a recipe) and beef.





leafed past the expected fried wonton and *mee krob* noodles, there was a wonderland of dishes from all over Thailand. From the northeast Isaan region, grilled fermented-pork sausages with fried peanuts and raw chiles; pungent *larb* salad made with chopped catfish; soupy, intensely peppery Lao-style vegetable curries; and clean, lime-scented, chile-hot salads of every description, even *koi soi*, a sort of beef tartare whose effect depends on tangy beef bile, an ingredient you don't find at Kroger. A hot-sour soup was flavored with a kind of Cambodian smoked fish I wasn't aware you could get in the United States, and there was a great version of my favorite Thai appetizer, *nam kao tod*, a salad made with crunchy rice, fried peanuts, and cubes of raw cured pork sausage. On the back of the menu, there was a roster of the restaurant's real specialties: the robust, salty-bitter cooking of northern Thailand, including a fleshy jackfruit salad, the roasted green-chile dip *nahm prik nuhm*, and an almost-perfect version of the delicate curried-noodle dish *khao soi*.

It was the best Thai meal I had ever eaten. I went back for the next four or five meals in a row, and I almost cried when I had to get on a plane back to New York. I called it the best Thai restaurant in North America in my review for the magazine, and in the dozen years since, it has become probably the most famous Thai restaurant in the United States. The chef, Saipin Chutima (who runs the restaurant with her husband, Bill, and

their daughters), tied for "Best Chef: Southwest" last year by the James Beard Foundation, making her the first Asian-born chef to win a Beard award for cooking the cuisine of her homeland. It was a stunning, and overdue, tribute.

Lotus of Siam has expanded over the years (it no longer has any relationship with the restaurant of the same name in New York), and Bill has built up the meager wine list into an important collection of German whites, a brilliant pairing with spicy food. There's a refinement, a lightness and pitch-perfect balance to Saipin's cooking that captures all that's great about Thai cuisine. But she also occasionally introduces Western elements into Thai formulas in a way that could be interpreted as fusion, putting salmon into *khao soi*, perhaps, or cooking a steak in the manner of *sua rong hai*, with a spicy sauce.

The restaurant has made it into practically every Las Vegas guidebook in existence, and tourists regularly cab it there from the major hotels. There is still a \$9.99 buffet lunch. But the real astonishment in visiting and revisiting the restaurant over the years is its purity: the authenticity of the cooking and the quality of the ingredients the Chutimas have managed to maintain in a restaurant with essentially no Thai customers. Thai restaurants, like Thai herbs, are difficult to cultivate in the dry heat of Las Vegas. The Chutimas have made theirs thrive. —Jonathan Gold, restaurant critic for LA Weekly

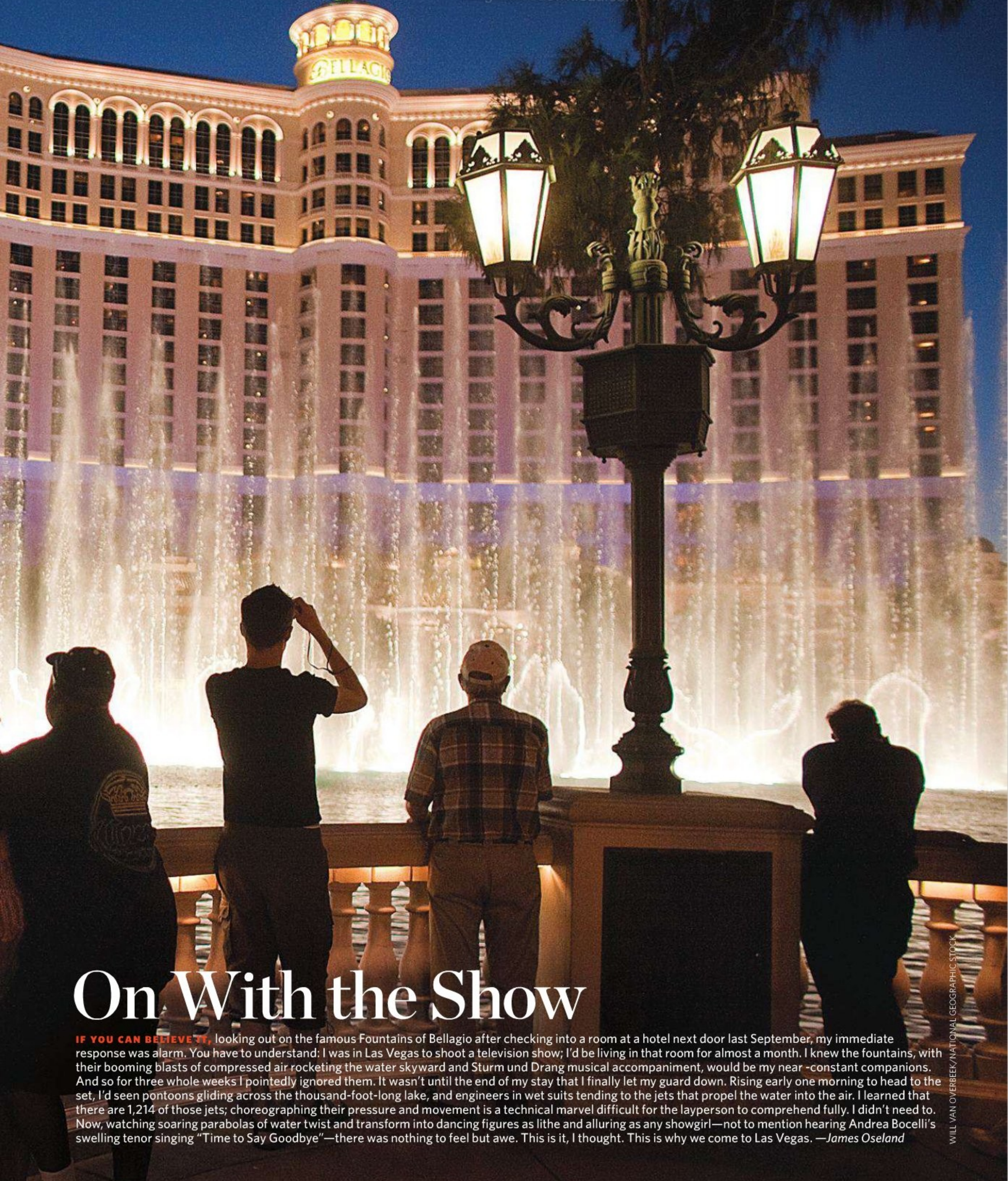
8 MUST-HAVE DISHES AT LOTUS OF SIAM

❶ *Nam kao tod*, a salad made with crunchy fried rice, peanuts, and cured pork sausage
❷ *Nua dad deaw*, a northern Thai-style beef jerky
❸ *Nahm prik nuhm*, roasted green-chile dip made with garlic, onion, and tomatoes

❹ *Koi soi*, Isaan-style minced raw beef with fresh herb, chili rice powder, and lime juice
❺ *Sai oua*, spicy northern Thai-style pork sausage
❻ *Khao soi*, a Burmese-influenced curry noodle dish flavored with onions

and herbs
❼ *Larb*, a chopped chicken, pork, or beef salad with scallions, chiles, and lime juice
❽ *Som thom*, a classic green papaya salad with ground peanuts, chiles, tomatoes, fish sauce, lime, and sugar





On With the Show

IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT, looking out on the famous Fountains of Bellagio after checking into a room at a hotel next door last September, my immediate response was alarm. You have to understand: I was in Las Vegas to shoot a television show; I'd be living in that room for almost a month. I knew the fountains, with their booming blasts of compressed air rocketing the water skyward and Sturm und Drang musical accompaniment, would be my near-constant companions. And so for three whole weeks I pointedly ignored them. It wasn't until the end of my stay that I finally let my guard down. Rising early one morning to head to the set, I'd seen pontoons gliding across the thousand-foot-long lake, and engineers in wet suits tending to the jets that propel the water into the air. I learned that there are 1,214 of those jets; choreographing their pressure and movement is a technical marvel difficult for the layperson to comprehend fully. I didn't need to. Now, watching soaring parabolas of water twist and transform into dancing figures as lithe and alluring as any showgirl—not to mention hearing Andrea Bocelli's swelling tenor singing "Time to Say Goodbye"—there was nothing to feel but awe. This is it, I thought. This is why we come to Las Vegas. —James Oseland



The author and her family sit down to a Sunday meal at the Las Vegas home of her mother, Eatty Du. Seated clockwise from left are the author's cousin, Jeremy Hsia; the author's brother's fiancée, Bridget Chu-Dante; the author's niece, Mia Sun; the author's brother, Alex Sun; and the author. On the table are Shanghaiese dishes made by the author and her mother:

- ❶ pickled radish and green onion salad; ❷ Shanghai-style spare ribs; ❸ braised lion's head meatballs with Napa cabbage; ❹ chilled braised pumpkin with red dates; ❺ tomato and beef stir-fry; ❻ celery, carrot, and bean sprout salad with sesame oil; ❼ sweet and sour shrimp (see page 76 for a recipe); ❽ shredded pork, dried bean curd, and cilantro; ❾ Chinese chicken wings with rehydrated mushrooms; ❿ pickled cucumber salad with wood ear mushrooms; ⓫ thousand-year-old egg and tofu salad with pickled mustard greens.



NOTHING BETTER THAN A HOME-COOKED MEAL

I GREW UP IN Las Vegas. Those six simple words never fail to provoke an awkward pause in conversation. Followed, inevitably, by the polite, "So, what was it like?"

There were no neon lights at the ranch house where I spent my childhood. No showgirls, no \$5 buffets, no Cirque du Soleil spectacles. There was just my mom and a 30-year-old wok. We moved to Las Vegas when I was five, to a street on the west side of town that wasn't even a blip on our crinkled map. It was a road less traveled compared to most coming-to-America stories, I suspect, moving from Taiwan to Michigan to Vegas. But my mother, Eatty Du, who fled her native Shanghai with my grandparents in the 1940s to escape the Communist regime, was always one for the unexpected. When we arrived in Vegas in the early 1990s, the city had no Chinatown yet; that would come later, after thousands of immigrants from mainland China flocked here to fill jobs at a number of newly opened resorts. When Mom needed the earthy dried mushrooms essential to her delicious stock, or the funky black bean paste that added the perfect hint of umami to her stir-fries, we used to have to pile into our beat-up minivan for the five-hour pilgrimage to Los Angeles.

Nowadays I live in LA, and when I visit Mom, she bustles around her kitchen with armfuls of ingredients from one shiny new Asian market or another. We bicker over whether to braise or fry the porky lion's head meatballs, and discuss the merits of the leftover vegetables she's about to toss into her ginger-spiced stock. And as we sit together to eat with my brother, Alex, and the rest of our family, I feel such a fondness for our Chinese table in Las Vegas. And all that glitters on the Strip feels so far away. —Andrea Sun, account director at the hospitality public relations firm Bullfrog & Baum

4 ASIAN SUPERMARKETS

99 Ranch Market (4155 Spring Mountain Road; 702/364-8899) is the oldest and most-beloved Asian market in Chinatown.

SF Market (5115 Spring Mountain Road; 702/876-0088) carries an amazing array of produce.

Greenland Supermarket (6850 Spring Mountain Road; 702/459-7878), a Korean establishment, is the largest spot in town, featuring a stellar food court and prepared foods to go.

168 Market (3459 South Jones Boulevard; 702/363-5168) includes a fantastic bakery for Chinese pastries and cakes.

TODD COLEMAN

33 Reasons to Go to Vegas Now

1. Brett Ottolenghi supplies Vegas's restaurant elite with everything from creamy California-raised foie gras to the red algae that is the magic behind molecular gastronomists' gels. At his store, **Artisanal Foods** (2275 East Sunset Road; 702/436-4252; artisanalfoods.com), you can shop like the chefs.

2. With its open kitchen and exquisite small plates, **L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon** (MGM Grand; 3799 South Las Vegas Boulevard; 702/891-7358; mgmgrand.com) is the more easygoing sibling to the very haute Joël Robuchon (see number 17, below).

3. To dine on some of the world's best seafood in a plush cabana on the shores of a shimmering man-made lake at **Bartolotta Ristorante Di Mare** (Wynn Las Vegas; 3131 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 888/352-3463; wynnlasvegas.com) is to understand the enchantment of Las Vegas.

4. DC-based French chef Michel Richard has done Vegas a good turn by opening a 24-hour spot for upmarket feel-good food like lamb shanks, lobster burgers with ginger mayo, and chocolate Celebration Cake topped with a lit sparkler at **Central Michel Richard** (Caesars Palace; 3570 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/650-5921; centrallv.com).

5. Designed by David Rockwell and dripping with more than 2 million crystal beads, the three-story **Chandelier Lounge** in the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas (3708 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/698-7000; cosmopolitanlasvegas.com) makes you feel as if you're suspended in an enormous twinkling chandelier, particularly after a few expertly made negronis.

6. Some of the best drinking in town can be done off-Strip at the low-key, quietly cultish **Downtown Cocktail Room** (111 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/880-3696; thedowntownlv.com), with its solid classics, inventive concoctions, and formal absinthe service.

7. Spanish chef José Andrés's tiny culinary laboratory **é** (The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas; 3708 Las Vegas Boulevard South; ebyjoseandres.com) is accessible

only through a hidden door from Jaleo, the chef's more traditional tapas restaurant. At two nightly seatings, eight guests sit down to 20-plus artfully curated courses, including the likes of frozen watermelon, chickpea stew, and caramelized pork rinds.

8. The organic roasted pineapple and sage sidecar at **Encore's Eastside Lounge** (Encore at Wynn Las Vegas; 3131 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/770-7000; wynnlasvegas.com) is the kind of surprising, fresh-tasting drink that mixologist Patricia Richards is known for.

9. Lose yourself in a Jacuzzi-sized fruity cocktail at **Fireside Lounge** (Peppermill Restaurant; 2985 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/735-4177; peppermilllasvegas.com), a dimly lit trysting spot where the flaming pool means you don't have to choose between fireside and waterfront seating.

10. Leroy Schmalz, Crazy Al Evans, and other tiki art stars created the carved idols and Polynesian paintings at **Frankie's Tiki Room** (1712 West Charleston Boulevard; 702/385-3110; frankiestikiroom.com). The complex rum cocktails, both classic and contemporary, honor the tiki tradition.

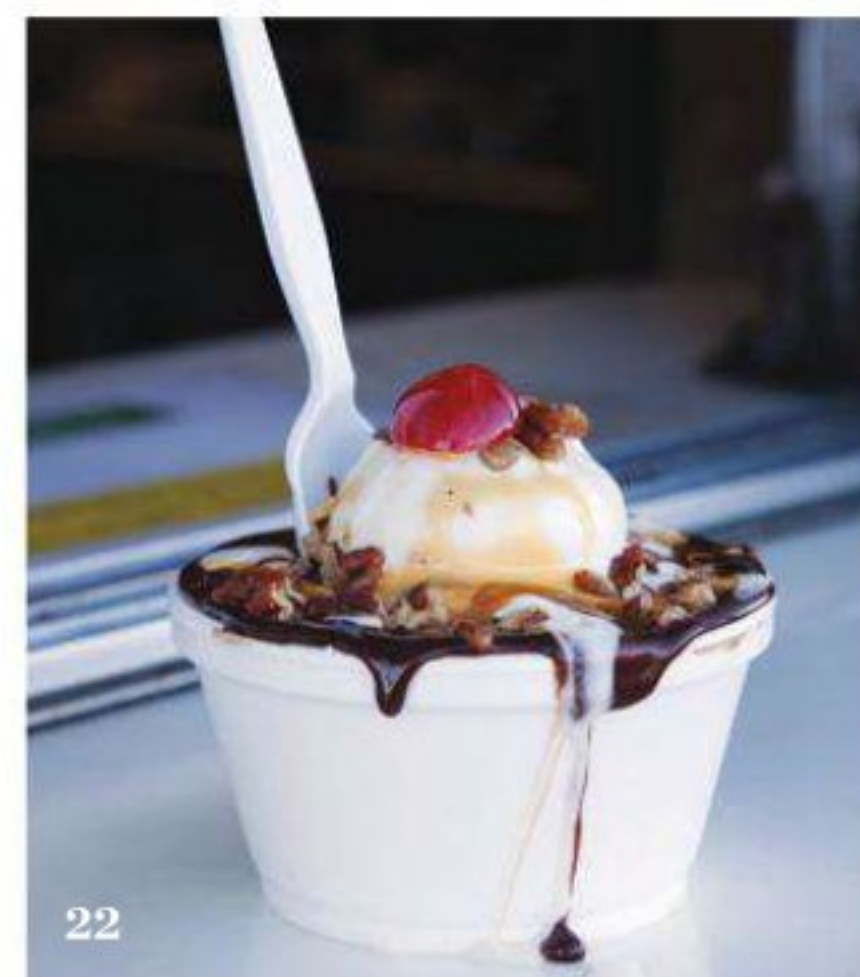
11. Over its 54 years, the city's oldest steak house, the **Golden Steer** (308 West Sahara; 702/384-4470; goldensteersteakhouselasvegas.com), has mastered the classics: ice-cold martinis and generous surf 'n' turfs, served in a leather-upholstered milieu virtually frozen in time since the Rat Pack era.

12. At **Restaurant Guy Savoy** (Caesars Palace; 3570 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/731-7286; guysavoy.com) the French chef treats Vegas to his signature luxe cuisine (artichoke black-truffle soup, butter-roasted sweetbreads). If the notion of a bread sommelier sounds gratuitous, you haven't seen Savoy's mind-boggling bread cart.

13. Pre-Prohibition nostalgia rules at **Herbs & Rye** (3713 West Sahara Avenue; 702/982-8036; herbsandrye.com), with exemplary renditions of vintage cocktails like the Moscow mule and the bee's knees.



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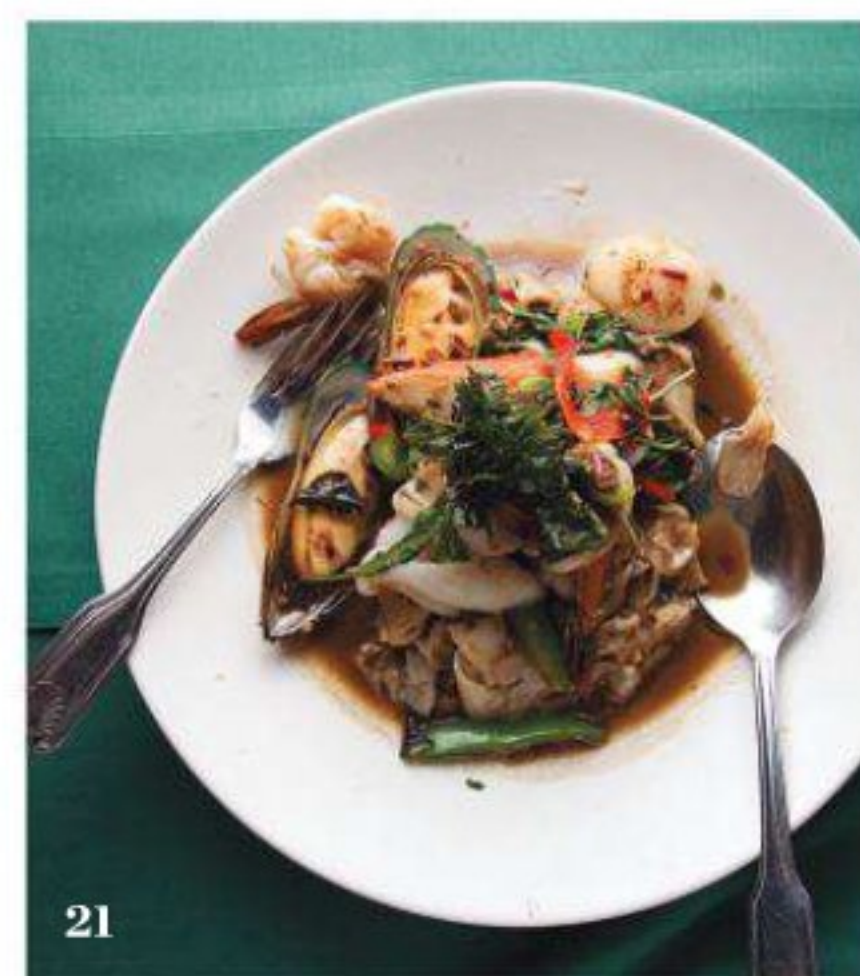
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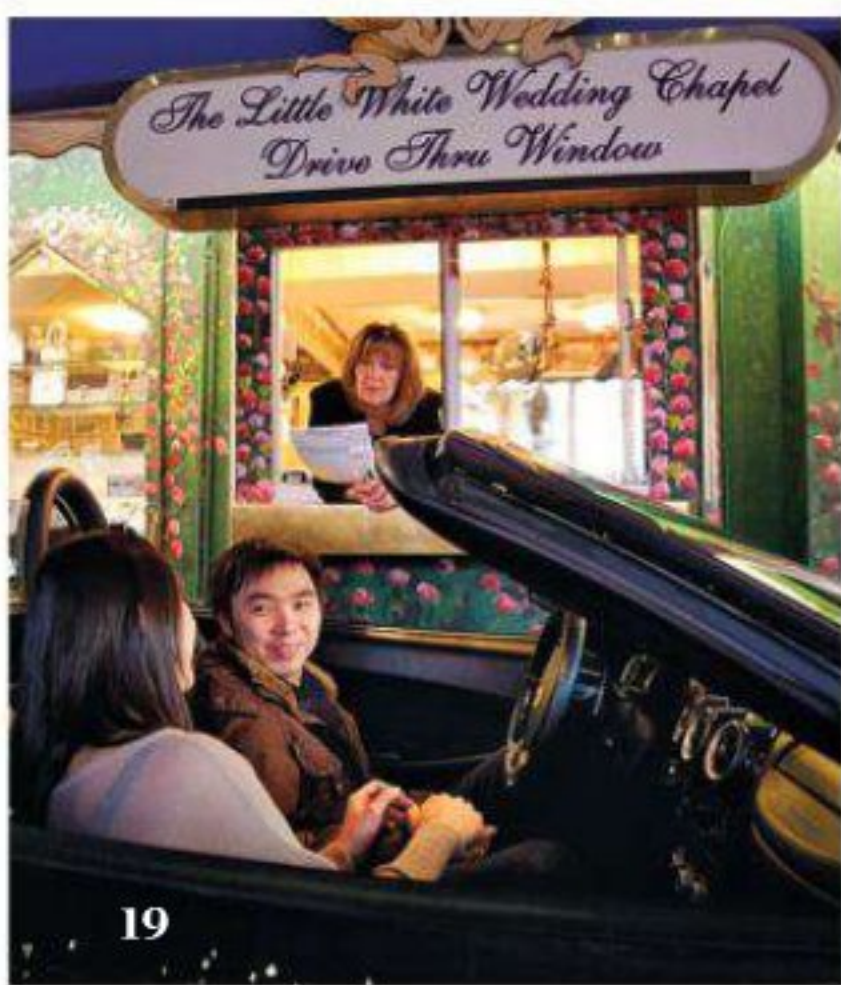
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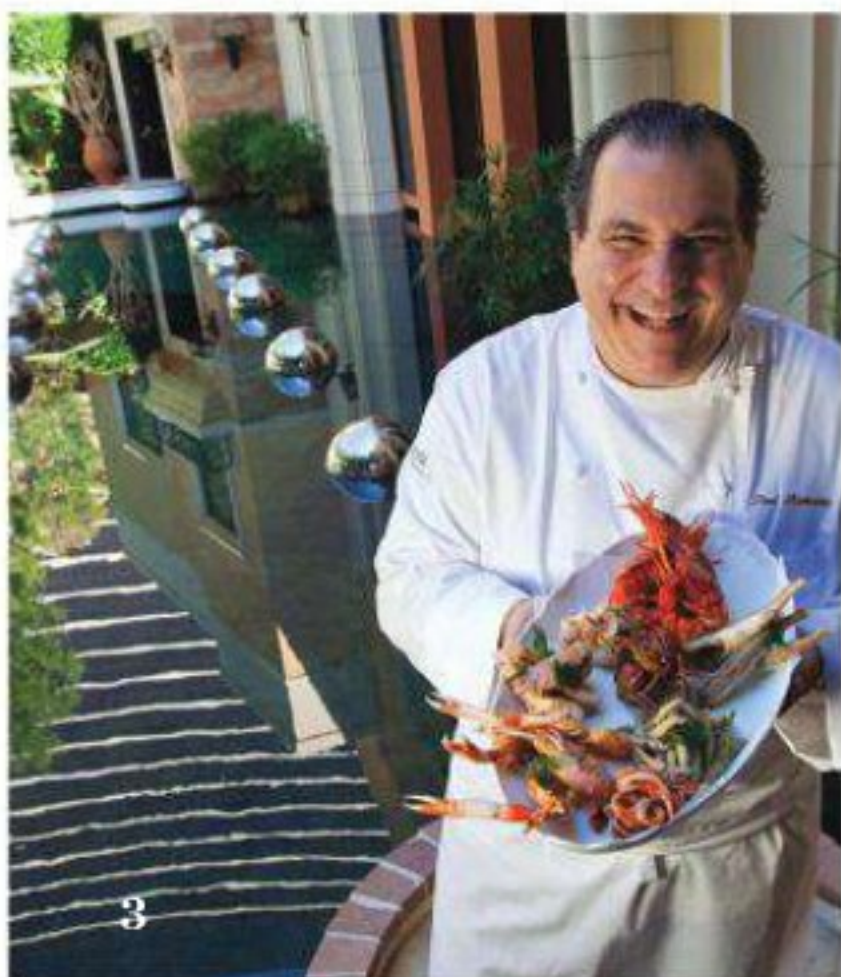
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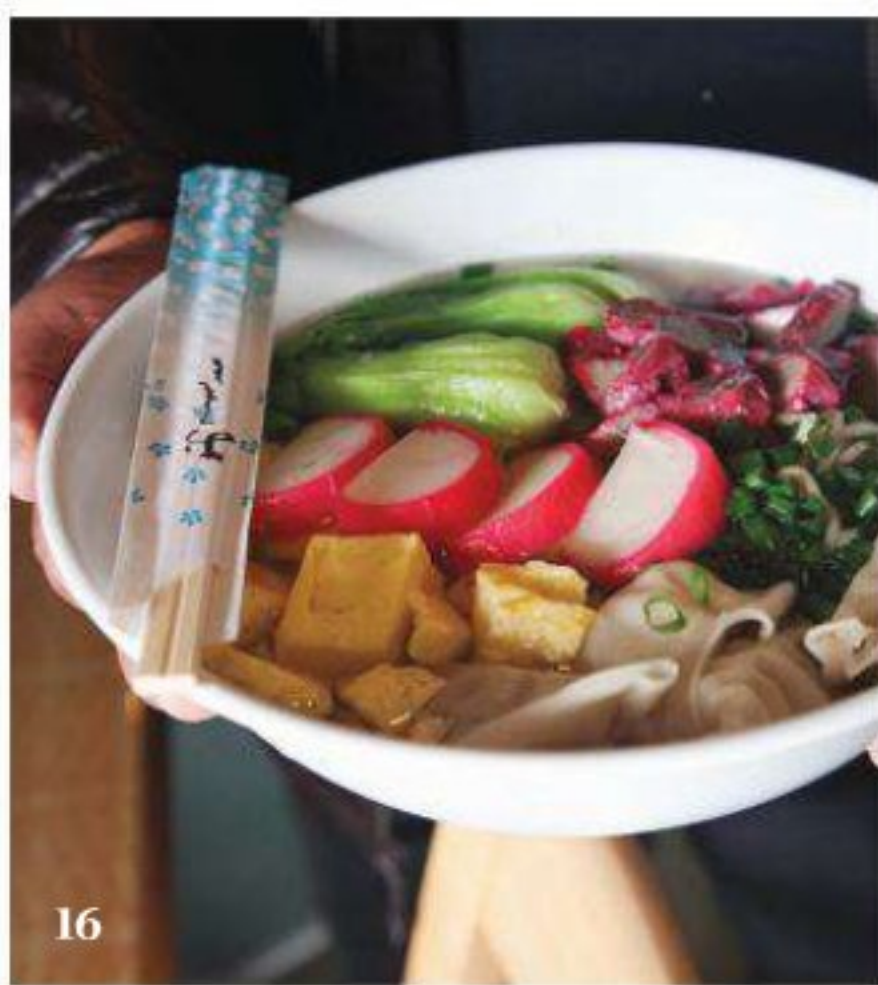
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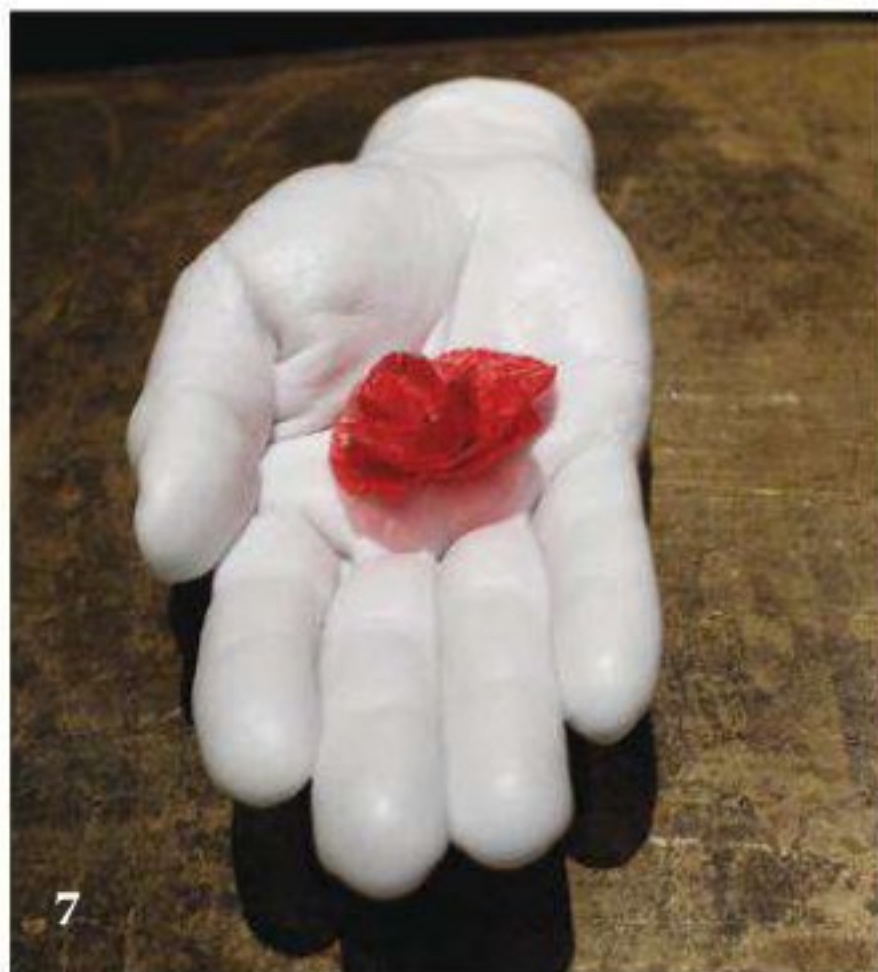
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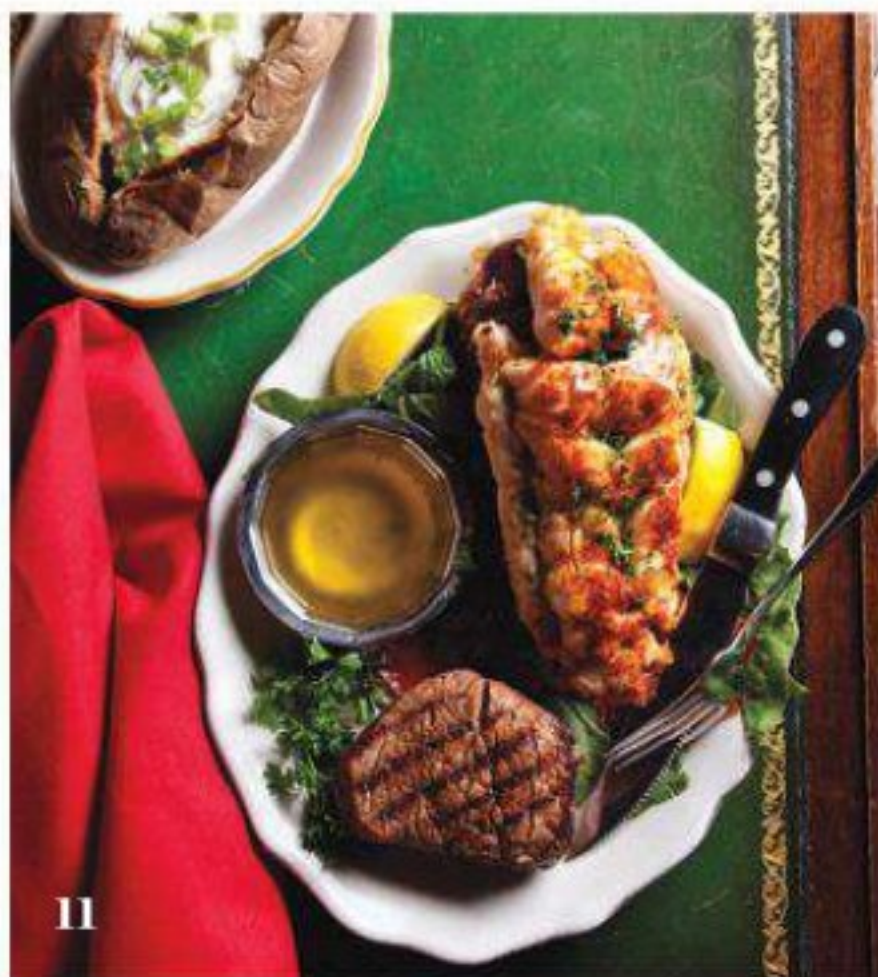
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14. There's plenty of action at the tables of **Honey Pig** (4725 Spring Mountain Road; 702/876-8308), a Korean barbecue joint whose succulent pork belly, cooked on tabletop grills, is well worth the trip to Chinatown.

15. At café-market **Ilobasco** (2520 South Eastern Avenue #6; 702/431-0411), you can feast on *pupusas*—meat- and cheese-stuffed corn tortillas topped with chile-hot *curtido* (cabbage slaw)—then stock up on Salvadoran staples like *yuca* and *pepescas* (sardines).

16. The 12,000-plus Hawaiian expats who call Vegas the Ninth Island favor **Island Flavor** (8090 South Durango Drive; 702/876-2024; islandflavorlv.com) for dishes like *saimin* (noodle soup with pork *char siu*, fish cakes, wontons, scrambled egg, bok choy, and scallions).

17. The 3 Michelin-starred **Joël Robuchon** (MGM Grand; 3799 South Las Vegas Boulevard; 702/891-7925; mgmgrand.com) is a cathedral of fine dining on a jewel box scale—just 17 tables.

18. We love the pan-fried noodles with shrimp at **KJ Kitchen** (5960 Spring Mountain Road; 702/221-0456), an unassuming storefront that serves some of Vegas's finest Cantonese fare.

19. The home of the drive-through nuptial, **Little White Wedding Chapel** (1301 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/382-5943; alittlewhitechapel.com) has been marrying celebrities (Newman and Woodward, Willis and Moore) and civilians alike since 1947.

20. Stop at **Los Antojos** (2520 South Eastern Avenue #2; 702/457-3505) for tacos filled with *cochinita pibil* (citrus-marinated slow-roasted pork), gorditas, *huaraches*, and more.

21. At **Lotus of Siam** (953 East Sahara Avenue, number A5; 702/735-3033; saipinchutima.com), sample spicy, brightly flavored Thai dishes like *rad na* (stir-fried broad rice noodles with Chinese broccoli and seafood). Lotus also features one of Vegas's best wine lists, with a stellar selection of German Rieslings—perfect pairings for this food.

22. What makes more sense in the desert heat than a Banana Fudge Krumble sundae? For 39 years, **Luv-it Frozen Custard** (505 East Oakey Boulevard; 702/384-6452; luvitfrozencustard.com) has been providing surpassingly rich, thick frozen custard, made fresh daily.

23. An homage to the band that gave us "Free Bird," **Lynyrd Skynyrd BBQ & Beer** (Excalibur Hotel and Casino; 3850 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/597-7818; lynnyrdskynyrdlv.com) matches ribs and brisket with cocktails like the lemony whiskey-and-cider honey badger.

24. Mary Rusch arrives at **Mary's Hash House** (2605 South Decatur Boulevard; 702/873-9479; hashhouse.com) before dawn each day to bake cinnamon rolls from scratch and sling superlative hashes.

25. The **Neon Boneyard**, a park outside the Neon Museum (821 Las Vegas Boulevard North; 702/387-6366; neonmuseum.org) where retired signage goes out to pasture, has a post-apocalyptic beauty all its own.

26. With winey baked clams and succulent veal chops, the Vegas outpost of New York City's **Rao's** (Caesars Palace; 3570 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 877/346-4642; caesarspalace.com) is the best red-sauce joint in town.

27. No place in Vegas does sustainable seafood the way Rick Moonen's **RM Seafood** (Mandalay Place; 3930 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/632-9300; rmseafood.com) does. Dine downstairs for classic clam shack fare, upstairs for a high-end tasting menu.

28. The hash browns at **São Paulo Cafe** (Rio Hotel & Casino; 3700 West Flamingo Road; 800/752-9746; riolasvegas.com) are legendary. Go after the Penn & Teller show, in the early morning, or whenever the mood strikes.

29. Sure, an order of *kani* (crab) salad comes to the table atop a glass bowl containing a swimming fish, but at **Shibuya** (MGM Grand; 3799 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/891-3001; mgmgrand.com), the sake list is dead serious.

30. The Flamingo is old Vegas, eternal Vegas, perhaps nowhere more so than in its coffee shop, the **Tropical Breeze Café** (Flamingo Las Vegas; 3555 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/733-3111; flamingolasvegas.com), where the omelettes are expertly made.

31. It's a pleasure to see a revered French chef getting into the Vegas spirit with imaginative, theatrical dishes at **Twist by Pierre Gagnaire** (Mandarin Oriental Hotel; 3752 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 888/881-9367; mandarinoriental.com).

32. **Wicked Spoon** (The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas; 3708 Las Vegas Boulevard South; 702/698-7000; cosmopolitanlasvegas.com) reimagines the buffet for gastronomes, with everything from potpies to dumplings presented in individual skillets and cocottes.

33. Go to **Yi Mei Champion Taiwan Deli** (3435 South Jones Boulevard; 702/222-3435) at lunch or dinner for all the noodles, pork, and pickled greens that make Taiwanese food so satisfying. But breakfast here—hot soy milk, say, with *youtiao* fritters for dipping—is to die for.

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: LONDON NORDEMAN; PENNY DE LOS SANTOS (2); LONDON NORDEMAN; SECOND ROW: TODD COLEMAN; JAMES OSELAND; THIRD ROW: LONDON NORDEMAN; TODD COLEMAN; LONDON NORDEMAN; PENNY DE LOS SANTOS (4)

Chile-Miso Chicken Wings

SERVES 4

Executive chef Pui Wing Hui's sweet red chile and miso sauce bathes fried chicken wings (pictured on page 41) at the Mansion at MGM Grand.

- ½ cup soy sauce
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- 1 tbsp. rice vinegar
- 4 tsp. Chinese rice wine
- 1 tbsp. Asian chile-garlic sauce (see page 85)
- 1 tsp. white miso
- 3 cups canola oil, for frying
- 2 lb. chicken wings or drumettes
- 8 dried chiles de arbol

1 Make the sauce: Whisk together soy sauce, sugar, cornstarch, vinegar, wine, chile-garlic sauce, and miso in a small bowl; set aside.

2 Heat oil in a 14" flat-bottom wok or skillet over high heat. Working in batches, add chicken, and fry, turning gently, until golden brown and cooked through, about 6 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain; pour off all but 1 tbsp. oil. Return wok to medium-high heat, and add sauce and chiles; cook, stirring, until reduced and thickened, about 5 minutes. Return chicken to wok, and cook, tossing to coat in sauce, until sauce glazes chicken, about 2 minutes.

Gaeng Panang Gai

(Panang Chicken Curry)

SERVES 4-6

The recipe for this spicy Thai dish (pictured on page 68) comes from Lotus of Siam chef Saipin Chutima.

- 2 cups coconut milk
- ¼ cup Panang curry paste (see page 85)
- 1½ lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut crosswise into ¼"-thick slices
- 3 tbsp. fish sauce (see page 85)
- 2 tbsp. dark-brown sugar
- 2 cups chicken stock
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 4 Kaffir lime leaves, sliced thin (see page 85)
- 4 sprigs basil, to garnish
- Cooked jasmine rice, to serve

Bring coconut milk and curry paste to a steady simmer in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; cook, stirring, until oil begins to separate, about 12 minutes. Add chicken; cook, stirring, until cooked through,

about 5 minutes. Add stock, fish sauce, and sugar; bring to a boil. Remove from heat; season with salt and pepper. Ladle chicken and sauce into bowls; garnish with lime leaves and basil, and serve with rice.

Gan Shao Xia

(Sweet and Sour Shrimp)

SERVES 4

Home cook Eatty Du makes these shrimp bathed in a sweet and tangy sauce (pictured on page 72).

- ¼ cup ketchup
- 2 tbsp. Chinese rice wine (see page 85)
- 1 tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 tbsp. mirin (see page 85)
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 tbsp. minced ginger
- 3 scallions, cut into 2" pieces
- 1 lb. large head-on shrimp, shelled and deveined
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Cooked white rice, to serve

Whisk together ketchup, wine, soy sauce, mirin, sugar, and 1 tbsp. water in a bowl; set sauce aside. Heat oil in a 14" flat-bottom wok or skillet over high heat. Add ginger and scallions; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add shrimp; cook, stirring, until beginning to turn pink, about 2 minutes. Add sauce; cook, stirring, until thick, about 1 minute. Remove from heat; season with salt and pepper. Serve with rice.

Grilled Chicken With Red Onion Jam

SERVES 6

SAVEUR kitchen director Kellie Evans created this easy picnic dish for a family lunch at Red Rock Canyon (see page 38).

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup minced parsley
- ¼ cup minced basil
- 2 tbsp. minced rosemary
- 2 tbsp. minced thyme
- 1 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, pounded to ¼" thickness, halved
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 large red onions, sliced thin
- ¾ cup dry red wine
- ½ cup sherry vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup black raspberry liqueur, such as Chambord

1 Mix oil, parsley, basil, rosemary, thyme, chile flakes, garlic, and lemon juice and zest in a gallon-size resealable plastic bag; add chicken. Seal bag, and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour (or overnight). Meanwhile, heat butter in a 12" skillet over medium heat. Add onions; cook, stirring, until soft but not browned, about 15 minutes. Add wine, vinegar, sugar, liqueur, salt, and pepper; cook, stirring, until thick, about 40 minutes; let jam cool.

2 Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill to medium-high. (Alternatively, heat broiler to high.) Working in batches, grill chicken, turning once, until browned and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Serve with jam.

Michel Richard's Deviled Eggs

SERVES 6

Deviled eggs (pictured on page 48) get an update with white anchovies and *masago arare*, Japanese rice cracker beads that mimic caviar.

- 6 hard-boiled eggs
- 3 tbsp. sour cream
- 2 tbsp. anchovy paste
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 12 white anchovy filets, rinsed and drained
- 1 tbsp. minced chives
- 1 tbsp. white masago arare (optional; see page 85)
- ½ small head frisée, leaves separated, for serving

Halve eggs lengthwise; set whites aside. Place yolks in a small bowl, and mash with a fork; stir in sour cream, paste, mustard, and salt and pepper. Transfer to a small piping bag fitted with a ⅜" star tip; pipe into egg white cavities, and then place an anchovy filet over each egg. Sprinkle with chives, and masago arare if you like. Place frisée on a serving platter, and place eggs on top to serve.

Pesce alla Palermitana

(Whole Roasted Fish "Palermo Style")

SERVES 4

Made with scorpion fish at Bartolotta, this dish works just as well with red snapper.

- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 cups halved cherry tomatoes
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 8 oz. fingerling potatoes, halved lengthwise

- 1 cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup pitted small green olives
- ¼ cup capers, rinsed
- 3 tbsp. roughly chopped fresh oregano, plus 5 sprigs
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 1-lb. red snapper, gutted, cleaned, and scaled
- 1 tbsp. chopped parsley

1 Heat oven to 450°. Heat 6 tbsp. oil in a 14" high-sided skillet over medium-high heat; add tomatoes and garlic, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 6 minutes. Add potatoes, wine, olives, capers, oregano sprigs, juice, and ¾ cup water; boil. Season fish with salt and pepper, and add to skillet; transfer to oven, and cook, basting fish with sauce every few minutes until fish is cooked through, about 20 minutes.

2 Transfer fish to serving platter, and transfer skillet to stove over medium-high heat. Cook sauce until reduced and thickened, about 10 minutes. Stir in remaining oil, chopped oregano, parsley, and salt and pepper to taste; pour sauce over fish to serve.

Porterhouse With Lemon-Thyme Butter

SERVES 2

A thyme-infused butter enhances the flavor of this skillet-seared steak (pictured on page 55), inspired by one at Prime Steakhouse. Pair it with one of the homemade steak house sauces on page 83.

- 1 3-lb. 2"-thick porterhouse steak, at room temperature
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 6 sprigs thyme
- 1 lemon, halved crosswise

1 Season steak heavily on both sides with salt and pepper; let sit for 30 minutes. Heat oven to 500°. Heat a 12" cast-iron skillet over high heat until it begins to smoke. Add oil and steak; cook until lightly charred on one side, about 5 minutes. Flip steak, and transfer skillet to oven; cook until medium-rare and an instant-read thermometer reads 135°, about 10 minutes. Transfer steak to a platter, and let rest for 10 minutes.

2 Meanwhile, pour off pan drippings and return skillet to stove over high heat. Add butter and then thyme and lemon halves, cut sides down; cook until golden brown, about 4 minutes. Remove from

heat. Slice steak around the bone. Transfer to plates, and drizzle with butter from skillet. Serve with the lemon for drizzling.

Rao's Spaghetti With Marinara Sauce

SERVES 4-6

This Italian-American classic (pictured on page 64) is adapted from Rao's in Las Vegas.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 oz. bacon, cut into ¼" cubes
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 8 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 small yellow onions, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 28-oz. cans whole peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed
- 1 lb. spaghetti
- 20 basil leaves, roughly torn
- Grated Parmesan, for serving

Heat oil and bacon in a 12" skillet over medium heat; cook, stirring, until bacon renders its fat, about 10 minutes. Add oregano, garlic, onions, and salt and pepper; cook, stirring, until soft, about 8 minutes. Add tomatoes; boil. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cook, stirring, until sauce thickens, about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, and add spaghetti; cook until al dente. Drain; add to sauce with basil, and toss. Sprinkle with Parmesan.

Spaghetti con Gamberi

(Spaghetti With Shrimp)

SERVES 4

Chef Paul Bartolotta uses sweet langoustines for this simple, flavorful pasta dish (pictured on page 44).

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 cups cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 1 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 lb. jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1½ cups dry white wine
- Kosher salt, to taste
- 10 oz. spaghetti
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- 1 sheet yaki nori (roasted seaweed; optional), cut in slivers
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat ¼ cup oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add tomatoes, chile flakes, and garlic; cook, stirring, until soft, about 6 minutes. Add wine; cook until reduced by half, about 6 minutes. Add shrimp;

cook, turning once, until just pink, about 3 minutes. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil; add spaghetti, and cook until al dente, about 7 minutes. Drain, reserving ¼ cup cooking water, and add pasta to skillet along with cooking water, remaining oil, parsley, nori, and juice; cook, tossing, until sauce thickens, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

White Cheddar Macaroni and Cheese

SERVES 8

Sun-dried tomatoes and ham flavor this dish (pictured on page 63), just one of many versions served at the Wicked Spoon's mac and cheese bar.

- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ⅓ cup flour
- 2½ cups milk
- 2½ cups heavy cream
- 12 oz. white cheddar, grated
- 8 oz. cooked ham, chopped
- 3 oz. crumbled blue cheese
- ½ cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes
- ½ cup caramelized onions
- ⅓ cup thinly sliced scallions
- 4 slices cooked bacon, chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Tabasco sauce, to taste
- Freshly grated nutmeg, to taste
- 1 lb. cavatappi or macaroni, cooked al dente
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs

Heat oven to 350°. Heat butter in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; add flour, and cook, stirring, until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add milk and cream; simmer. Cook until thickened, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in ¾ of the cheddar along with the ham, blue cheese, tomatoes, onions, scallions, and bacon; season with salt, pepper, Tabasco, and nutmeg, and stir in pasta. Transfer mixture to a 9" x 13" baking dish. Sprinkle with remaining cheddar. Top with bread crumbs; bake until golden, about 25 minutes.

DRINKS

Andalucia

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

This sherry cocktail (pictured on page 58) with a Manchego garnish comes from Las Vegas's Downtown Cocktail Room.

- 2 oz. cream sherry
- 1 oz. walnut liqueur, such as Nocello (see page 85)
- ¼ tsp. sherry vinegar, such as Capirete 20 Reserva

- 4 golden raisins
- 1 ¼"-thick wedge Manchego

Stir sherry, liqueur, and vinegar in a cocktail shaker with ice until chilled; strain into a chilled champagne coupe. Garnish with raisins and cheese, speared with a toothpick.

Blueberry and Basil Margarita

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

Wynn mixologist Patricia Richards shared the recipe for this refreshing margarita (pictured on page 58), served at the Eastside Lounge at the Encore at Wynn Las Vegas.

- 2 oz. fresh lime juice
- 1½ oz. fresh lemon juice
- 3 tbsp. sugar
- 3 oz. fresh blueberries
- 4 basil leaves, plus 1 sprig
- 3 oz. reposado tequila
- 1½ oz. Grand Marnier
- 1 oz. agave syrup

Boil juices and sugar in a small saucepan until sugar dissolves; cool. Pour syrup into a shaker with all but 4 blueberries and the basil leaves; crush with a spoon. Add tequila, Grand Marnier, and agave. Fill with ice, and shake. Strain into a highball glass filled with ice; garnish with remaining blueberries and basil.

Scarlet Starlet

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

This fruity whisky cocktail (pictured on page 58) is served at Delmonico Steakhouse in the Venetian.

- 1½ oz. Scotch whisky
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- ¾ oz. lightly beaten egg white
- ½ oz. vanilla cognac liqueur, such as Navan (see page 85)
- ½ oz. hibiscus syrup (see page 85)
- ½ oz. strawberry syrup (see page 85)
- 1 organic red rose petal

Shake whisky, juice, egg white, liqueur, and syrups in a cocktail shaker until frothy. Add ice; shake to chill. Strain into chilled champagne coupe; garnish with rose petal.

The Libertine

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

Rosemary brings an herbal note to this whiskey drink (pictured on page 58) made by Mariena Mercer at the Chandelier Bar in the Cosmopolitan.

- 2 oz. simple syrup
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 4 oz. bourbon

- 2 oz. fresh lemon juice
- 2 tsp. orange marmalade
- 1 tbsp. maple syrup
- 1 tbsp. fresh orange juice
- 1 egg white

Boil simple syrup and 1 sprig rosemary in a small saucepan; cool. Discard rosemary; transfer syrup to a cocktail shaker with bourbon, lemon juice, and marmalade. Add ice, shake until chilled, and strain into a highball glass filled with ice. Add maple syrup, orange juice, and egg white to shaker; shake until frothy. Spoon froth over top of cocktail; garnish with remaining rosemary sprig.

Tiki Bandit

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

This contemporary tiki cocktail (pictured on page 58) created at Frankie's Tiki Room contains a bright mix of fresh fruit juice, syrups, and rums.

- 4 oz. pineapple juice
- 4 oz. ginger ale
- 1½ oz. gold rum
- 1½ oz. pineapple rum, such as Cruzan
- 1 oz. blue curaçao
- 1 oz. orgeat (see page 85)
- 1 oz. passion fruit syrup (see page 85)
- 1 oz. fresh grapefruit juice
- 1 wedge pineapple
- 1 maraschino cherry

Shake pineapple juice, ginger ale, rums, curaçao, orgeat, syrup, and grapefruit juice in a cocktail shaker with ice until chilled; strain into a tiki cup filled with ice. Garnish with pineapple and cherry.

Whiskey Rock-A-Roller

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

Tobin Ellis created this drink (pictured on page 58) based on a rhubarb pie for Lynyrd Skynyrd BBQ & Beer.

- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 5 raspberries
- 3 oz. Kentucky-style bourbon, such as Bulleit
- 1 oz. fresh lemon juice
- ½ oz. strawberry liqueur (see page 85)
- 4 dashes rhubarb bitters (see page 85)
- 1 sprig mint

Crush sugar and 4 raspberries with a spoon in the bottom of a cocktail shaker. Add bourbon, juice, liqueur, and bitters, fill with ice; shake to chill. Strain into a chilled old-fashioned glass filled with ice, and garnish with remaining raspberry and mint sprig.



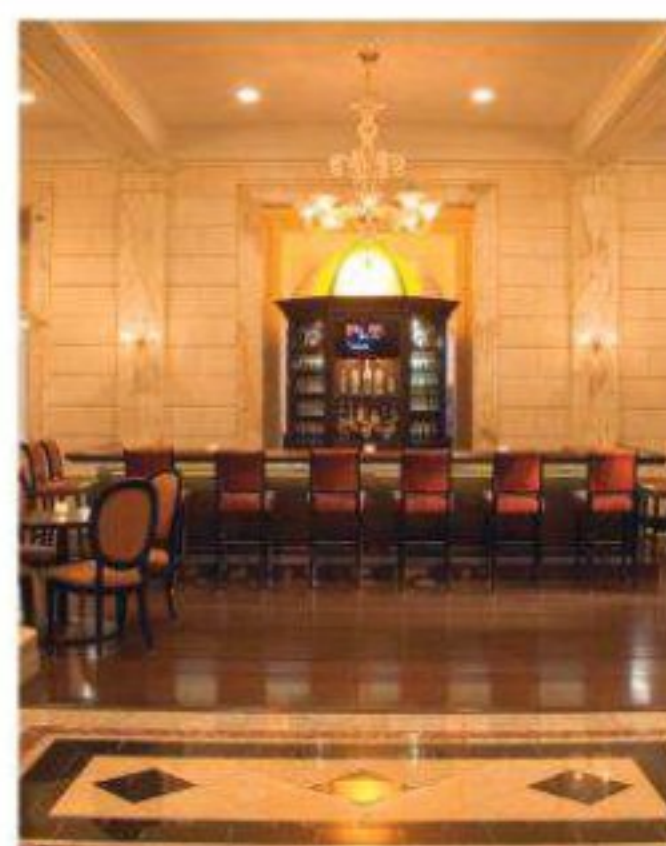
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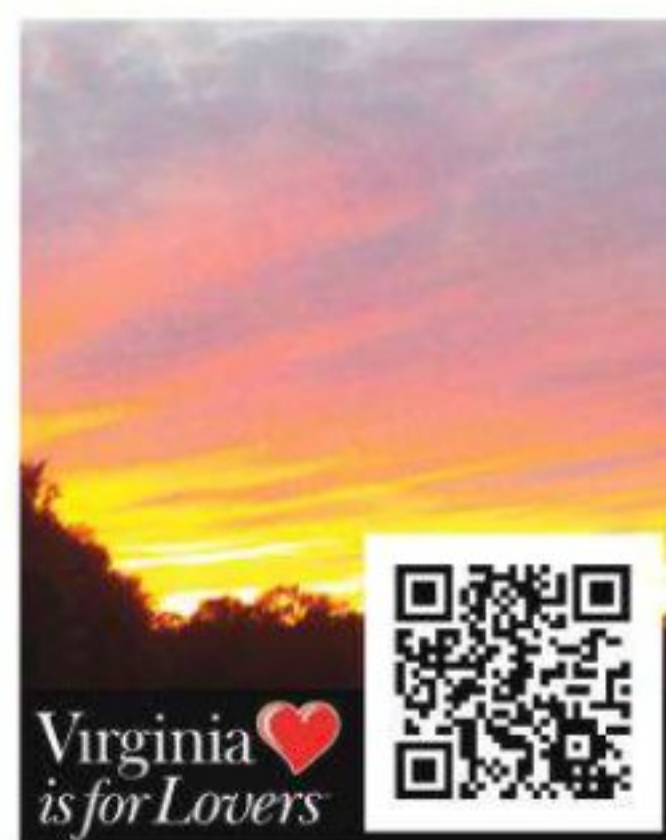


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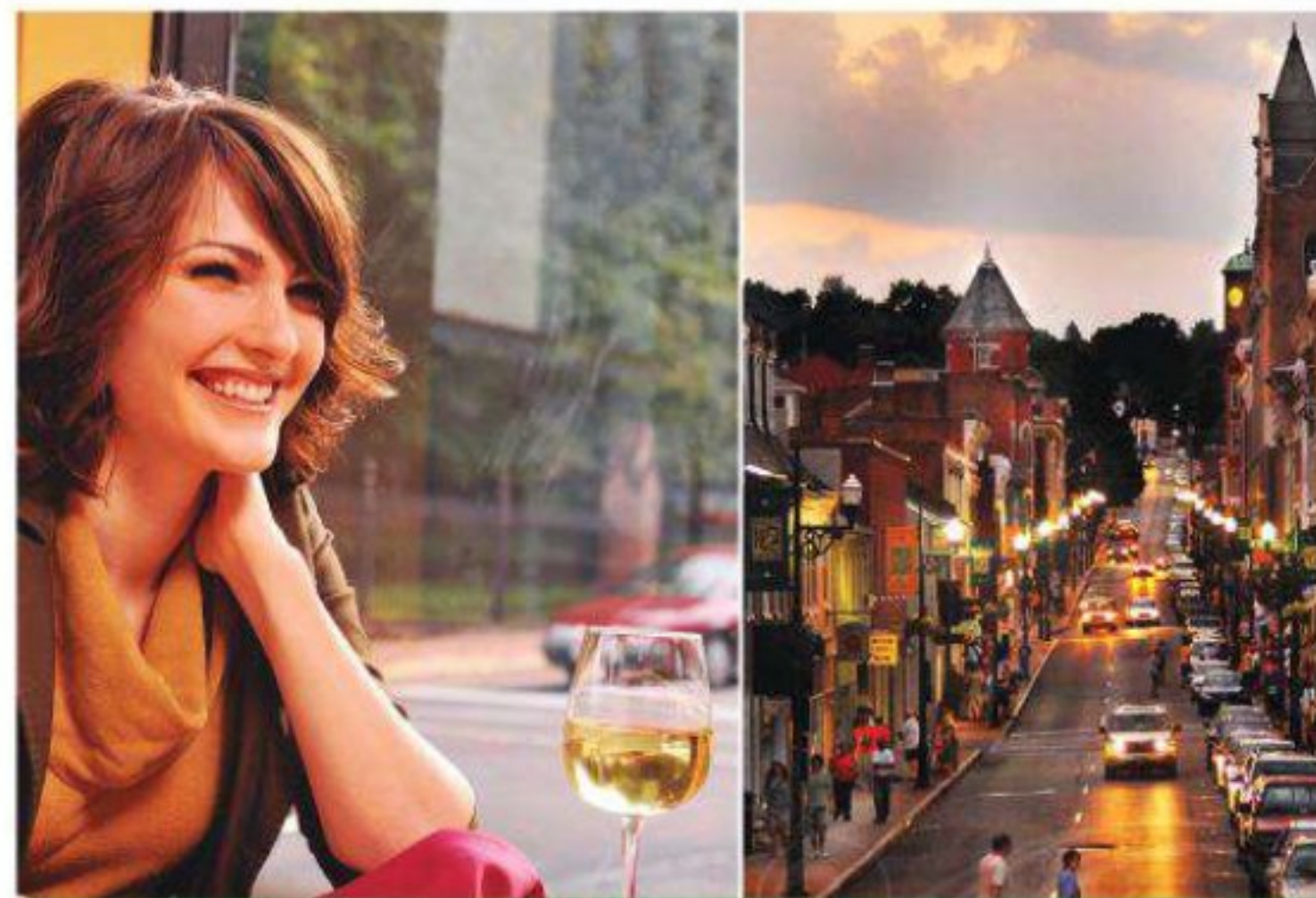


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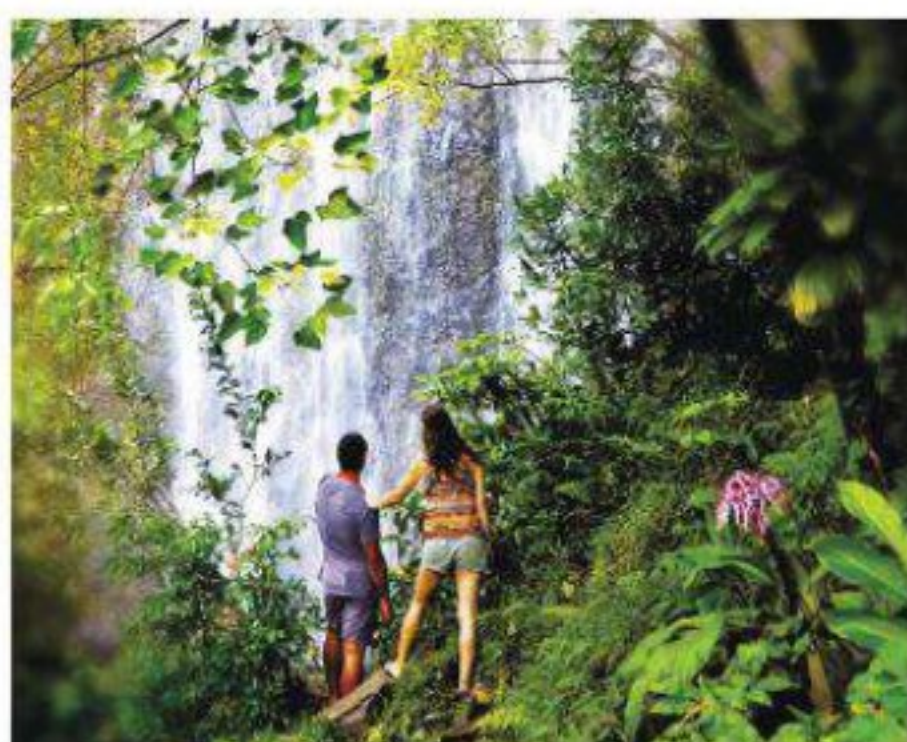
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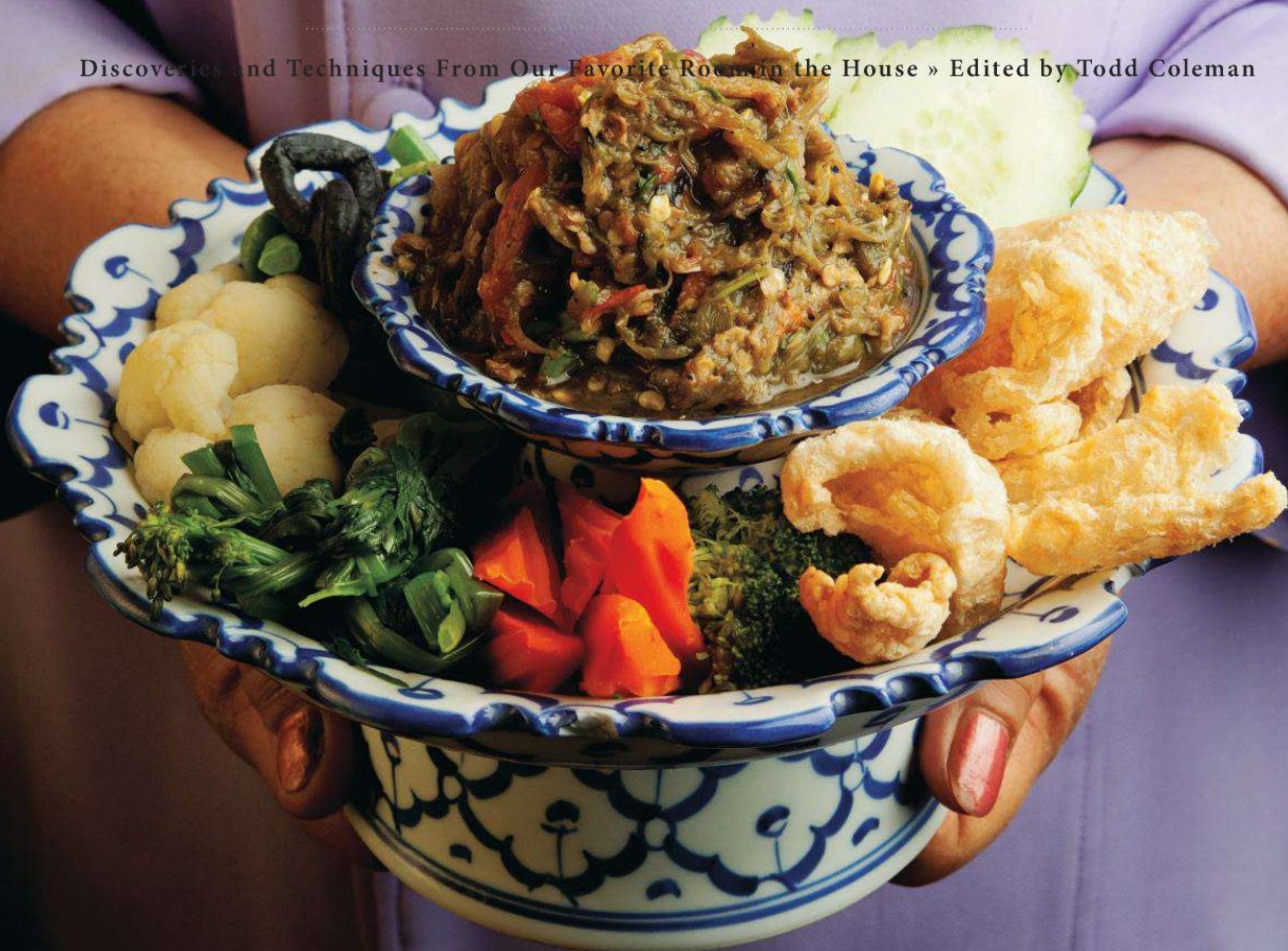
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Thai Tutorial

LAST FALL IN LAS VEGAS, I spent a day in the kitchen at Lotus of Siam with Saipin Chutima. How lucky was I? Her authentic Thai cooking has earned her a legion of fans (such as author Jonathan Gold; see “Hot, Sour, Sweet, Bitter, Hot,” page 68). I was especially blown away by her *nahm prik noom*, a fiery, funky northern Thai chile dip served with raw vegetables and fried pork rinds. Saipin’s husband, the amiable, professorial Bill Chutima, explained that while ingredients vary from region to region in Thailand, and the stuff itself might be used as either dip or a sauce to be eaten with

rice, all such chile-based pastes are called *nahm prik*; *noom* is the name for a sweet, mildly hot chile not usually found outside Thailand. (At Lotus of Siam they approximate with banana pepper plus hotter Holland chiles.) The luscious dip came together easily in a mortar; it was mostly a matter of knowing how to handle the ingredients. Charring the chiles mellows them; cilantro stems stand in for cilantro root—also hard to come by in the States—for a sharp herbal kick. “We have no high-end equipment,” Bill told me, with evident pride. “We have only the skill of the cook.” —Beth Kracklauer

Nahm Prik Noom Heat a 12” cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Place 6 cloves unpeeled garlic in skillet, and cook, turning, until charred in spots, about 7 minutes; remove from skillet and set aside. Place 3 banana peppers and 1 red Holland chile in skillet, and cook, turning, until charred all over, about 9 minutes; set aside. Add 6 cherry or grape tomatoes to skillet, and cook, turning, until charred all over, about 12 minutes; set aside. Add ½ small red onion, thinly sliced, to skillet, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 9 minutes. Transfer onions to a food processor; add 1 tbsp. Thai shrimp paste (see page 85), 1 tsp. sugar, 1 tsp. kosher salt, and 1 dried stemmed chile de arbol and purée. Peel the charred garlic and peppers of their skins, roughly chop the peeled peppers, and add to food processor along with garlic and tomatoes; pulse together into a coarse yet smooth-textured paste. Transfer mixture to a serving bowl and stir in 3 tbsp. finely chopped cilantro (including stems) and 1 finely chopped scallion. Serve with cucumber, steamed cauliflower florets, carrots, green beans, and deep-fried pork skins.

TODD COLEMAN

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Chefs' Obsessions

Chefs on the Las Vegas Strip may have the world's most high-tech kitchens, but many of their go-to tools and ingredients are simple, creative solutions that would come in handy for any cook. Pascal Sanchez, chef de cuisine at *Twist* by Pierre Gagnaire, uses a repurposed perfume atomizer **1** for a last-minute tableside spritz of raspberry liqueur and vodka on a macaron. And it's great for spraying flavorful oils on dishes where a light touch is required—ceviche, for instance, or delicate salads. In order to whip up foam garnishes, *Le Cirque* executive chef Gregory Pugin relies on a battery-powered cappuccino whisk **3**, which is also great for whisking sauces in portions too small for an immersion blender. Steve Benjamin, executive chef of *L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon*, keeps his culinary tweezers **4** at the ready for artful arrangements of ingredients, but home cooks will find them super useful for everything from boning fish to decorating cakes. Jason Neve, culinary director of Mario Batali's Vegas restaurants, swears by his inexpensive, unglazed Milton Brook mortar and pestle **5** for pestos and spice pastes: its surface is just the right amount of rough, and the porcelain is sturdy enough to hold up to years of pounding. In addition to tools, Vegas chefs have their go-to ingredients, and surprising ways of using them. Take Rick Moonen of *RM Seafood*, who has been adding fermented black garlic **2**, with its raisinlike sweetness and subtle earthiness, to sauces for sweet seafood, like lobster. At *Bartolotta Ristorante di Mare*, Paul Bartolotta turns rosemary sprigs into brushes **6**, which leave behind the flavor of the herb when he uses them to brush olive oil onto fish and meat. At *Tao*, Michael Armstrong reaches for *shichimi togarashi* **7**, a Japanese mix of dried chile, nori, citrus peel, and sesame seeds (among other things), to bring bright and savory flavors to everything from tempuras to tuna tartare. Cured meats are a major mainstay up and down the Strip. At *Public House*, Anthony Meidenbauer chops but-tery, rosemary- and juniper-strewn *Iberico de Bellota lardo* **8** into pâte and also serves it sliced on grilled bread; the cured pork fat from acorn foraging pigs carries the flavor of the herbs and lends a slightly nutty aroma to everything it touches, whether raw or cooked. David Walzog at *SW Steakhouse* drizzles the sweet, thick finishing vinegar *Noble Tonic 05* **9**, lush with notes of caramel, maple, and vanilla, over beet salad, but it's just as good over cured meats, cheese, and ice cream. —Helen Rosner

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Hitting the Sauces

The newfangled Las Vegas steak houses that Max Jacobson writes about in "Dining Like a Rhinestone Cowboy" (page 54) have upped the ante with super-aged steaks and high-tech grilling equipment. But they haven't abandoned the age-old tradition of dressing up a cut of beef with sumptuous, palate-piquing steak sauces like the two we're calling out here, souvenirs from a couple of our favorite Vegas steak palaces. —Ben Mims

Black Pepper-Horseradish Zabaglione

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

We usually think of zabaglione as a luscious dessert whipped up from egg yolks. At Mario Batali's and Joe Bastianich's Carnevino, steaks are sauced with this savory version spiked with grated horseradish.

- 2 tbsp. marsala wine
- 6 egg yolks
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup freshly grated or prepared horseradish
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- Freshly cracked black peppercorns, to taste

1. Pour enough water into a 4-qt. saucepan to reach a depth of 1"; bring to a boil over medium heat. Place marsala and egg yolks in a medium-size metal, nonreactive bowl, and whisk until smooth. Place bowl over the saucepan of simmering water. Whisking constantly, cook the yolks and wine together until pale and foamy and a ribbon forms on the surface of the foam when the mixture falls from the whisk, about 7 minutes.

2. Remove bowl from heat; stir in horseradish, salt, and a generous seasoning of pepper.

Miso-Mustard Butter Sauce

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

At chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Prime Steakhouse, when you order your preferred cut, the choice of accompaniments includes this sauce with intense umami flavor and a mustardy zing.

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup soy sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white miso
- 2 tsp. dry mustard powder
- 1 tsp. kecap manis (sweet soy sauce; see page 85)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. smoked sweet paprika
- Zest of 1 lime
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 12 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed and chilled

1. In a 2-qt. saucepan, whisk together soy sauce, miso, mustard, kecap manis, paprika, zest, salt, and pepper, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

2. Remove from heat and slowly add butter, a few cubes at a time. Whisk constantly until smooth and all butter is incorporated; season with salt and pepper before serving over steaks.

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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered ingredients and information too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY BEN MIMS

Fare

Purchase **Ski Queen Gjetost Cheese**, available at Amazon.com (\$7 for an 8.8-ounce block; amazon.com). To find a retailer selling the **Boyd & Blair Potato Vodka** (\$32 for a 750-milliliter bottle), go to their website, boydandblair.com. To view the entire collection of **vintage Las Vegas restaurant menus**, visit the University of Nevada, Las Vegas's University Libraries Digital Collections (digital.library.unlv.edu/collections/menus). Purchase all of our favorite Quebecois beers from Joshua Bernstein's "At Your Convenience" on page 18: For the **L'abri De La Tempête Corps Mort**, contact Beer Run (\$8.99 for a 12-ounce bottle; 418/986-5005); for the **Unibroue Éphémère Apple**, contact BevMo! (\$7.49 for a 750-milliliter bottle; 925/609-6000; bevmo.com); for the **Microbrasserie Dieu Du Ciel! Rosée d'Hibiscus**, contact West Lakeview Liquors (\$4.99 for a 341-milliliter bottle; 773/525-1916; wlvliquors.com); for the **L'abri De La Tempête Corne de Brume**, contact Beer Run (\$8.99 for a 12-ounce bottle; 418/986-5005); for the **Brasserie McAuslan St-Ambroise Apricot Wheat Ale**, contact EuroBrew Specialty Beer Importer (\$7.99–\$8.99 for a four-pack of 12-ounce bottles; 508/881-9900; eurobrews.com); and for the **Les Trois Mousquetaires Por-**

ter Baltique, contact K&L Wine Merchants (\$11.99 for a 750-milliliter bottle; 877/559-4637; klwines.com). When in Bali, Indonesia, stay at **Murni's Villas** (Villa Kunang-Kunang, Ubud; 62/361/972-146; murnis.com) or **Murni's Houses and Tamarind Spa** (Jalan Raya, Ubud; 62/361/975-165; murnis.com), where you can obtain instruction on creating traditional Balinese food offerings. Visit her restaurant, **Murni's Warung** (at the bridge, Campuan, Ubud; 62/361/975-233; murnis.com), and her shop next-door called **Murni's Warung Shop** (62/361/972-146; murnis.com).

Ingredient

To purchase many of our favorite poppy seed varieties, products made from poppy seeds, including their oil and a premade paste for filling pastries, and equipment used to process them for making easy fillings and candies, order **white poppy seeds**, available from Amazon.com (\$8.48 for a 7-ounce bag; amazon.com); **poppy seed oil**, available from iGourmet.com (\$19.99 for an 8.4-ounce bottle; 877/446-8763; igourmet.com); **poppy seed paste**, available from All In Kosher (\$5.55 for an 11-ounce can; 877/245-4872; allinkosher.com); and a **poppy seed grinder**, available from Otto's Hungarian Import Store and Deli (\$67.50 for an all-metal grinder; 818/845-0433; hungariandeli.com). To make the blueberry–poppy seed squares recipe (see page 24), purchase **ground poppy seeds**, available from Kalustyan's (\$8.99 for a 7-ounce bag; 212/685-3451; kalustyans.com), which you'll also need to prepare the poppy seed strudel (see page 24).

Las Vegas

To prepare the chile-miso chicken wings recipe (see page 76), purchase

chili-garlic paste, available from Asian Food Grocer (\$2.98 for an 8-ounce jar; 888/482-2742; asianfoodgrocer.com). To make Michel Richard's deviled eggs (see page 76), purchase **masago arare**, available from Jatfood.com (\$11.08 for a 300-gram bag; 377/97/986-858; jatfood.com). To make the Panang-style chicken curry (see page 76), purchase **red curry paste**, available from Indian Foods Company (\$5.29 for a 14-ounce container; 866/331-7684; store.indianfoodsco.com); **fish sauce**, available from Pacific Rim Gourmet (\$5.99 for a 24-ounce bottle; pacificrimgourmet.com); and **kaffir lime leaves**, available from Grocery Thai (\$4.50 for 1.5 ounces; 818/469-9407; grocerythai.com). To prepare the shrimp in sweet and sour sauce recipe (see page 76), purchase **Chinese rice wine** (\$7.99 for a 25-ounce bottle) and **mirin** (\$4.99 for a 10-ounce bottle), available from Indian Foods Company (see above). To make the Andalusia cocktail recipe (see page 77), purchase **Nocello liqueur**, available from Internet Wines and Spirits (\$23.65 for a 750-milliliter bottle; 314/865-0199; internetwines.com). To prepare the scarlet starlet cocktail recipe (see page 77), use **Navan liqueur**, available from the Whiskey Exchange (\$41.01 for a 1-liter bottle; 44/208/838-9388; thewhiskeyexchange.com) and **hibiscus syrup** (\$16.08 for a 1-liter bottle) and **strawberry syrup** (\$10.23 for a 1-liter bottle), available from Instawares (888/465-8807; instawares.com). To make the tiki bandit cocktail recipe (see page 77), purchase **orgeat**, available from Keg Works (\$6.59 for a 12.7-ounce bottle; 877/636-3673; kegworks.com) and **passion fruit syrup**, available from Instawares (\$10.23 for a 1-liter bottle; 888/465-8807; instawares.com). To prepare the whiskey rock-

a-roller recipe (see page 77), purchase **strawberry liqueur**, available from Grand Wine Cellar (\$29.99 for a 750-milliliter bottle; 888/614-9463; grandwinecellar.com) and **Fee Brothers rhubarb bitters**, available from Blackwell's Wine & Spirits (\$5.50 for a 4-ounce bottle; 415/386-9463; winecommune.com).

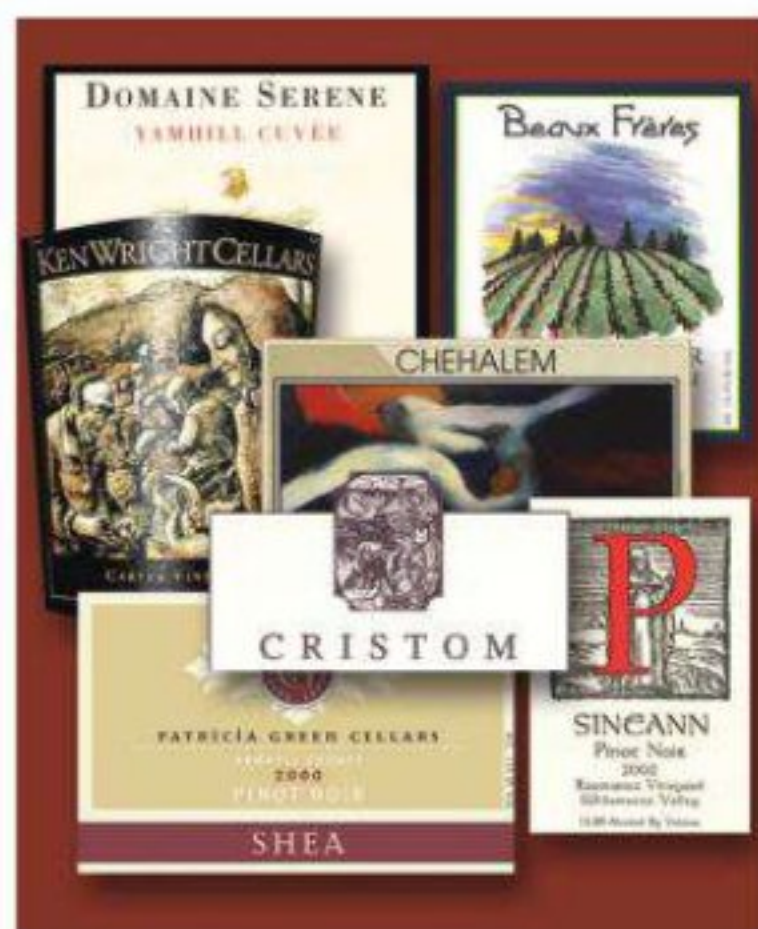
Kitchen

To make the *nahm prik noom* recipe (see page 81), purchase **Thai shrimp paste**, available from eCrater.com (\$8 for a 185-gram plastic container; look for Trachang Shrimp Paste Seasoning for Nam PrikKapi; ecrater.com). To get your hands on the list of our Las Vegas chefs' favorite tools and ingredients (see page 82), purchase the **Noble Tonic 05: XO** (\$69.95 for a 120-milliliter bottle) and **black garlic** (\$31.95 per pound), both available from Mikuni Wild Harvest (866/862-9866; mikuniwildharvest.com); **togarashi**, available from Amazon.com (\$15 for two 0.8-ounce jars; amazon.com); **culinary tweezers**, available from Cutlery and More (\$9.95; 800/650-9866; cutleryandmore.com); the **6" Milton Brook mortar & pestle**, available from Whisk (\$36; 718/218-7230; whisknyc.com); Boccalone **lardo**, available from Boccalone (\$36 for 1 pound; 415/433-6500; boccalone.com); and a **cappuccino whisk**, available from Gracious Home (\$19.99; look for an Aerolatte milk frother; 800/338-7809; gracioushome.com). To prepare the miso mustard butter sauce recipe from Jean-Georges Vongerichten's restaurant Prime Steakhouse in the Bellagio Las Vegas hotel and casino (see page 83), purchase **kecap manis**, also known as sweet soy sauce, available from Buy Asian Foods.com (\$4.29 for a 625-milliliter bottle; 888/598-9961; buyasianfoods.com).



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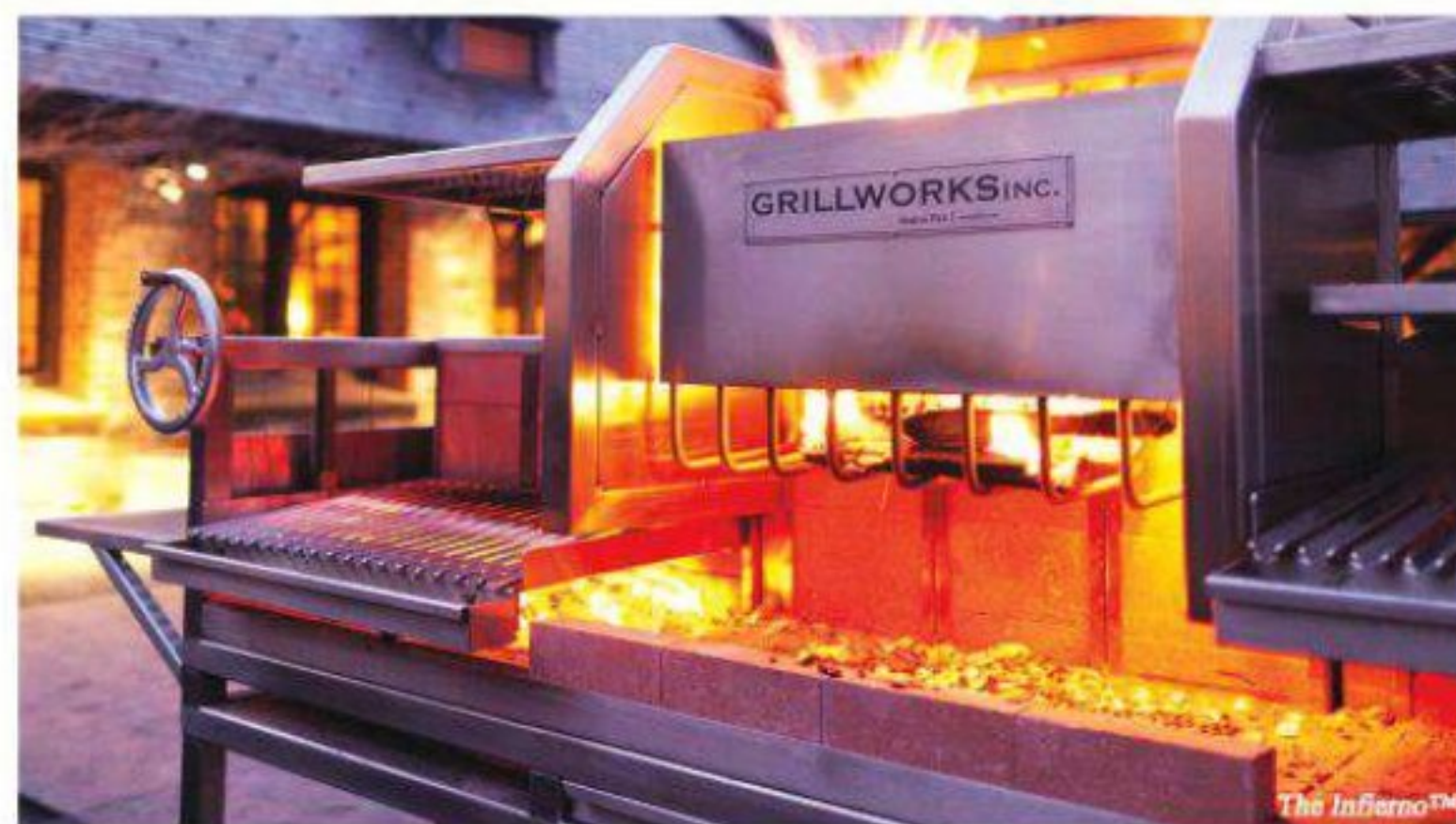
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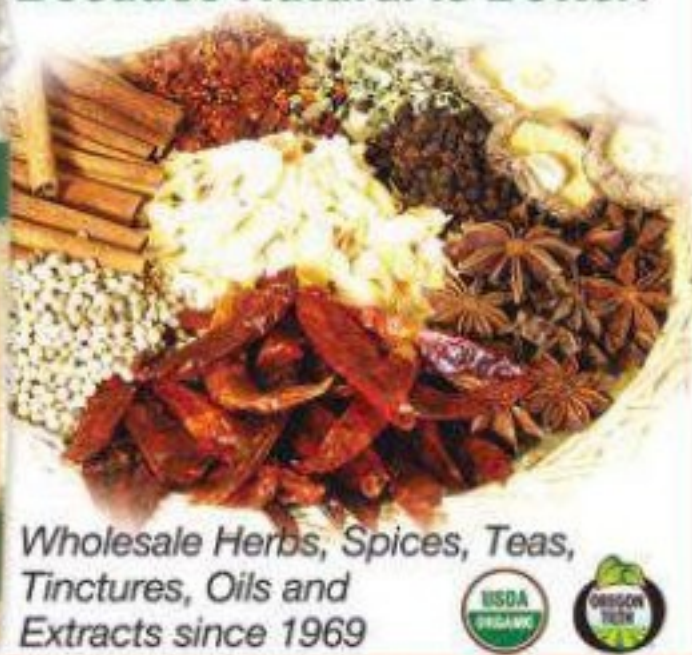
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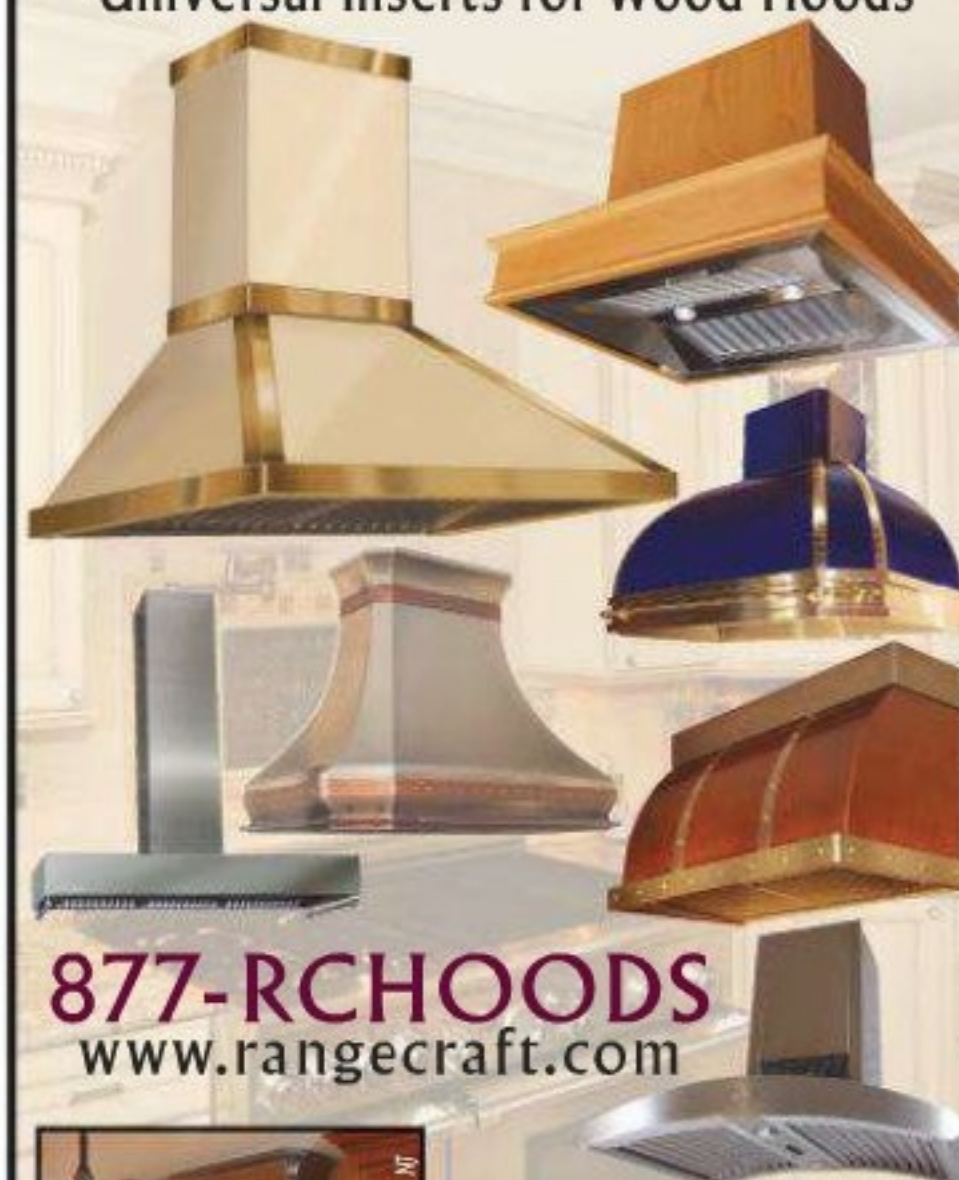


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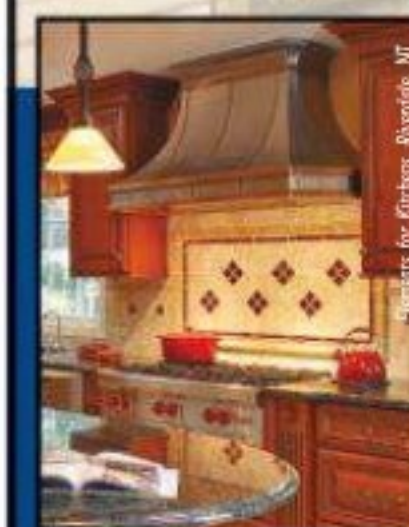


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Frank Sinatra works that old black magic on a dinner table in his hotel room at the Eden Roc hotel.

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